

Exploring alternative geographies, politics  
and identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina  
through contemporary art practices

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Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

UCL, Geography

### **Statement of Originality**

I, Charlotte Whelan, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis. I confirm that it is the result of my own original research and not the result of a collaborative project. I confirm that the thesis has not previously been submitted in part or full for a degree award at UCL or any other University.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C.E. Whelan'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and 'E'.

Date: 08/06/2017

## **Abstract**

An extensive literature in political geography has examined the breakup of Yugoslavia and the contested politics of its successor states. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a focus of particular attention due to the scale of violence that took place there and its complexity as the most multicultural state in Yugoslavia. However, existing studies have tended to maintain a focus on wartime events and the post-war fragmentation of the country, overlooking the ways in which these are being reworked creatively outside of orthodox political channels. In light of growing geographical interest in art, the thesis examines how Bosnia is being reworked through artistic practices and the implications of this for understandings of the region.

Conceptually, the thesis draws on feminist and subaltern approaches to geopolitics as well as debates in art theory and practice. Methodologically, it is based on ethnographic fieldwork and participation in ongoing art projects, as well as research on Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav art history. Engaging with artists and art practices, the thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the alternative geographies, politics and identities of contemporary Bosnia. While recognising the role of overtly political art, the thesis emphasises various forms of antipolitical art practice that question dominant narratives, add new layers to understandings of place, and allow for the redefinition of identity. The thesis also demonstrates how, through alternative networks and practices, artists are engaged in a process of normalising space. The argument is not that past events should be ignored but that artists are creating opportunities for multiple engagements with contested places. The thesis therefore moves the political geography literature on Bosnia forward by highlighting under-researched practices and suggesting new avenues of inquiry. More broadly, the analysis has implications for the way the region is studied and suggests orientations for the study of art in contested contexts.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

My research explores the relationships between art practices, geography and identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina; examining the role of artists and art practices in contested contexts, as well as the conditions under which art is produced, received and displayed. The official name of the country is Bosnia and Herzegovina, often shortened to BiH, however for ease of reading, I will refer to it as ‘Bosnia’ from this point on. Bosnia represents an interesting case study through which to explore the interactions between art, place and society due to the number of complexities and controversies surrounding its past, present and future. Within the social sciences there is maintenance of a focus on certain narratives of ethnicity, war and nationalism due to the region’s recent violent history, which has yet to be moved beyond. These narratives are mirrored in media and public perceptions of Bosnia, the effects of which are not only limited to global perceptions of the country, but additionally reinforce certain structural and developmental paths within it. Bosnia is constantly defined by its past and therefore condemned to relive it.

The people and spaces of Bosnia have been subjected to constant reframings by external and internal political actors (Ó Tuathail, 1996). By this I mean that the identities of its citizens have been constantly moulded and reshaped as a result of the many shifting historical and political processes it has experienced, processes that extend from ‘decades of European “Othering” and Imperial rule’ (Todorova, 2009, pp. 51–52) to the impacts of recent historical events. From the 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century Bosnia was part of the Ottoman Empire before becoming part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The first Yugoslavia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was established in the interwar period but the start of the Second World War saw it split between the occupying fascist forces, and Četnik and Partisan resistance forces. The war resulted in Partisan victory and the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), until its violent collapse during the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> The secessionist wars of the nineties saw claims for individual sovereignty from many of the Republics that made up Yugoslavia. Bosnia was one of the most significant due to the scale of the violence and its complex position as being in many ways a ‘Yugoslavia in miniature’ (Burg, 1999, p. 71), representing all of the main ethnic groups.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point on I will refer to the SFRY as Yugoslavia for ease of reading.

Bosnia has therefore experienced periods in which certain religious and ideological identities have been prioritised or even enforced: Muslim, Serb, Yugoslav, socialist, Bosnian. Whilst existing studies on the organisation of territory in the region have been essential in illuminating the constructed nature of these identities (see for example Toal and Dahlman, 2011), they have yet to move beyond perceptions of Bosnia as a site of primitive violence and competing nationalisms, or at least in their attempts to do so, simply reinforce these framings. This raises the question of how to establish new perspectives on fragmentation and modify the ways in which we analyse it. I aim to open up such narratives, first, through a critical appraisal of existing literature on Bosnia within the humanities and social sciences. Second, building on studies of artistic and creative practices both within and external to geography, I explore the alternative practices of artists in Bosnia and the ways in which they might be both geographical and political.

I first became interested in the idea of artistic engagements with place in Bosnia when I came across an article in November 2011 on the Abart project *(Re)collecting Mostar* (Hampton, 2011). This project involved gathering together students and artists, and using social media to connect with Mostar natives no longer living in the city to create an open archive of memories and maps of the city, those often excluded from official discourse. Combined with my existing knowledge of the position of art and culture as a significant form of resistance in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly during the wars of the nineties, I was interested to explore what I felt was the relatively overlooked situation of art and how or whether it relates to broader political issues in postwar society. As I have researched further, I have moved away from a focus on what I would class as overtly socially engaged art to examine the role of the art of refusal, or *antipolitical* art, and the thesis contrasts these two approaches.

The research took on a broader appeal, as it became set against a backdrop of activity in 2014 that, along with art practices and networks, saw people organising around issues outside of ethno-nationalist politics and divisions in Bosnia. These events were the mass protests that started in February 2014 and the series of floods in Serbia and Bosnia in May of the same year. On 4<sup>th</sup> February 2014, around one week before my first research trip to the country, protests broke out in Tuzla around the wave of



bankruptcies and closures of local factories, which provided employment for the majority of its citizens. Due to the shared nature of this problem, it was not surprising that the protests spread across Bosnia. The term ‘wild capitalism’ (Slavnić et al., 2013) has been used to describe the rather chaotic economies of post-socialist states across central and Eastern Europe. Some common features have been outlined as including:

deindustrialization, increasing unemployment and socio-economic inequality, coupled with a concomitant informalization of the economy, and segmented labour market, and precarious work and migration pressures (Slavnić et al., 2013, p. 34)

‘Wild capitalism’ has also come with large-scale corruption and in the case of the former Yugoslavia, war profiteering and an increasingly stratified society. As Slavnić et al (2013) observe, in Bosnia transition has been three-fold: postwar, post-socialist and the transition to independent statehood. Privatisation was pushed by the international community as a recovery strategy but, like peace strategies, has entrenched the ethno-nationalist elites that orchestrated and supported conflict in the region. With privatisation, deindustrialisation and increasing unemployment, the people of post-industrial towns, like the factories, have been left to decay.

The closure and privatisation of national industries is a problem throughout the former Yugoslavia but it is particularly pronounced in Bosnia, which was in many ways the industrial heart of Yugoslavia (Slavnić et al., 2013). During the course of the 2014 protests and demonstrations in Bosnia, citizens’ plenums were established in most towns. This was an opportunity for all citizens to gather together to discuss their demands to government for the future organisation of various structural aspects of the Bosnian state, and an example of people organising around shared problems to devise collective solutions. Unfortunately, the energy of the plenums died down but some important cultural projects emerged from them, which I will discuss further in this research.

In May of the same year, and again around one week before my next research trip, large areas of Bosnia and Serbia experienced some of the worst flooding in recorded

history. Existing infrastructural, economic and political problems meant that citizens themselves arranged a great deal of the support for affected communities. During my research in Prijedor with the art collective Tač.ka, I saw members of the collective and local NGOs going to help communities around the municipality. Similarly, in her work on returns and reconstruction in the town of Kozarac, Sivac-Bryant (2016) notes that a number of people from the town provided assistance to people in Prijedor town. Kozarac is a predominantly Muslim town that suffered greatly during the wars of the nineties. Prijedor is a largely Serb town and was the centre of many of the policies and actions that caused the destruction of Kozarac. Therefore cooperation and support during the floods, much like during the protests, demonstrates some of the ways that everyday citizens organise outside of ethno-nationalist borders. The focus of this thesis is to explore the ways that artistic practices engage with these processes however, it is important to note the turbulent chain of events that transpired around the research.

My research extends the existing political geography literature on Bosnia, which has mostly maintained a focus on orthodox processes and actors (for example Toal and Dahlman, 2011; Toal, 2013; Jeffrey 2013; Campbell, 1999). Building on existing critiques in feminist and subaltern geopolitics and their attempts to expand the tools and fields of analysis of geopolitical processes, I contribute to the growing body of literature on art and political geography (for example Ingram 2012; Hawkins, 2013) by researching beyond the Western contexts that have tended to dominate research to date. Specifically, Bosnia is of interest both in its own right and because it has so often been understood as a space that is liminal to the West. In politically controversial contexts such as Bosnia, what focus there has been on art has tended to analyse its role in challenging fragmentation or its ability to ameliorate trauma. The focus of this thesis, however, is to explore several features in the art history and practice of the region that enable us to rethink how connections between art, politics and space have been conceptualised and investigated in the literature to date. Through my engagement with these fields, my research goes beyond the Balkanist discourses that still surround Bosnia twenty five years after the start of the war and twenty years after the original 1997 publication of Maria Todorova's (2009) landmark text *Imagining the Balkans*.

My approach to the research was broadly ethnographic combined with some of the emerging creative practices in geography (Hawkins, 2013a) in order to explore not only how artists and cultural workers are using space, but also the role this may play in reimagining the relationships within and between people and places. The research is grounded in a wide-ranging engagement with emerging critical art practices in Bosnia. However, a key focus is the art collective Tač.ka from Prijedor, Republika Srpska, taking into account comparisons and engagement with groups working elsewhere. The networks that have emerged between artists in Bosnia and beyond are an important element of the research, but Tač.ka emerged as a unique site of exploration in terms of not only geographical location, but also the significance of their work in relation to both the conceptual issues that my research explores and the wider Bosnian art scene.

Based on my aims and motivations, and preliminary research in February 2014, I developed the following questions to orient my research:

**RQ1:** *How do artists in Bosnia engage with and rework geography?*

The primary question for my research explores the ways in which contemporary art practices in Bosnia can be seen to act geographically: what spaces are formed through artistic practices, how, and how do they interact with existing/other spaces? Through this I examine how artistic practices might help to rethink concepts of Bosnia as a fragmented country made up of ethnicised spaces and postwar landscapes.

**RQ2:** *What are the possible political implications of their practices?*

The second question builds on the first by exploring the broader political implications of art practices in Bosnia. Examining the art of refusal, or antipolitical art, and the ways in which it interacts with issues of trauma or contested contexts, I aim to contrast this with projects that seek to engage directly with the politics of place in order to assess the multiple and complex relationships between art and politics in Bosnia. I also explore the connections between these relationships and artistic success, both regionally and internationally. I believe these processes relate to broader assumptions or accepted narratives of the identities and realities of contemporary Bosnia.

**RQ3:** *How can an engagement with these practices help in rethinking the political geography and geopolitics of the region?*

The final question explores the ways in which my research contributes to a reconceptualisation of existing geopolitical narratives of Bosnia. I aim to examine the alternative spaces and networks formed through artistic practices and the extent to which they alter both regional and international constructions of space, identity and power in Bosnia. Existing literature in critical geopolitics has deconstructed the processes of ethnicization and fragmentation in the region. However, drawing on practices in feminist, subaltern and popular geopolitics, I explore the alternative political geographies of Bosnia present in artistic practices and spaces. How might these help us to think differently about borders, identities, politics and place?

The thesis is structured as follows:

**Chapter Two** outlines the geographical concepts I will be engaging with by critically reviewing existing international relations, politics, and critical geopolitics approaches to postwar examinations of Bosnia, along with the literature on ‘imagining the Balkans’ (Todorova, 2009).

Much of the existing political geography literature on fragmentation in Bosnia has been inspired by post-structuralist approaches such as deconstruction and discourse analysis. However the limitations of such approaches more broadly have been identified by feminist and subaltern scholars (for example Sharp, 2002, 2011, 2013; Koopman, 2011; Hyndman, 2003), who argue that this approach to political geography still does little to move beyond the actors involved in processes of fragmentation, war, oppression and so on. Engaging with their critiques, I aim to develop an alternative conceptual approach to Bosnia, and the position and role of artists within it. Whilst not claiming the term subaltern for my own research, I believe that the critiques and alternative conceptualisations of space and politics offered by scholars in this field are useful when thinking about the role art might play in relation to the concerns of political geography.

Art is a topic of growing interest in geography, with scholars such as Harriet Hawkins working in cultural geography, and numerous others contributing to debates on ‘experimental geographies’ and creative practices (Last, 2012; Paglen, 2008). In

particular the deployment of creative practices in the context of political geography has allowed scholars to build on feminist and subaltern critiques of critical geopolitics by moving studies beyond elite representations (Williams, 2014) to consider creative workings of space and power. Drawing on themes of embodiment and performativity, scholars examining art in relation to political geography have explored how creative practices use techniques of shock versus situatedness (Ingram, 2012a), disruption (Amoore and Hall, 2010; Williams, 2014), and the mobilisation of ‘different form(s) of attentiveness’(Amoore, 2009). Exploring these themes in art practices raises questions of how art can help us to resituate ourselves in relation to geopolitical structures (Ingram, 2012a), and hints towards alternative networks and structures in politically controversial or contested contexts (Ingram, 2012b). However, such work has often focused on Western contexts. My research will broaden the literature by considering the transferability of such approaches and the specificities of art in relation to the political geography of Bosnia.

**Chapter Three** goes on to explore debates in contemporary art practice in relation to socially engaged and participatory art, and situates them within broader examinations of the relationships between art, politics and aesthetics. This enables me to contextualise recent and current art practice in Bosnia in relation to broader debates about the nature and role of art in society, while reflecting further on the distinctive aspects of art, politics and aesthetics in the region.

I engage with the idea that cultural production can play an important role in addressing the events and divisions of the past, and that it represents an opportunity for people to re-engage and reframe these issues outside of traditional structures (Bishop, 2012). However, the counterarguments to this position will feature strongly in my research. For example, socially engaged or overtly critical art practices have been criticised for both taking pressure off governments and other actors to address social issues, and move some of the focus away from the art itself (Bishop, 2012), issues which are live in art debates in Bosnia today. I use these counterarguments in order to question how art can be political without claiming this as its purpose and to consider how the political exerts pressure within artistic spheres in ways that mirror pressures in society at large.

To explore questions specifically connected to the politics of art in the context of Bosnia, I review several related strands of literature. Exploring themes such as the politics of refusal or *antipolitics* in art, humour, and the dynamics of identity in relation to artistic practice, I not only bring new perspectives to the study of the region, but also to the study of the often-problematic relationships between art and politics. Humour has been researched in relation to geopolitics (Dittmer, 2013a; Dodds and Kirby, 2013; Kuus, 2008; Ridanpää, 2014a) but due to the specificity of its form and strong position in Bosnia and broader ex-Yugoslav culture (Sheftel, 2011; Vucetic, 2004; Žižek, 2002), I think an acknowledgement of its role in art practices here will contribute a different perspective to the growing body of literature in this field. The artistic strategies of humour, refusal and alternative identification also connect with problems surrounding the function and fetishisation of trauma in art. In Bosnia there is an underlying pressure and primacy given to art that somehow speaks to this issue and subsequently a sense of devaluing genuine engagement with trauma by Bosnian artists. Drawing on existing literature on art practices and trauma more broadly (Edkins, 2003; Pollock, 2009; Seltzer, 1997), I aim to explore the regional debates on this issue further to examine the specificities of the relationships between artistic practices and trauma in Bosnia.

**Chapter Four** explains my methodological approach to the questions I have posed. My research is largely ethnographic with an emphasis on an ‘observant participant’ rather than ‘participant observation’ approach (para Hawkins, 2013a, p. 199). This will be discussed through an exploration of existing studies in the field of art and creative practices, along with a justification of my decision to focus on Tač.ka and the municipality of Prijedor specifically.

**Chapter Five** is the first of my analytical chapters, exploring artistic engagements with contested spaces in Bosnia, and the fragmented narratives of art and history. The focus is on Kozara National Park and Tač.ka’s *Ars Kozara* project. Through an examination of Kozara’s history and artistic engagements with it, I demonstrate that there is room for diverse approaches to art and politics, and that allowing or normalising different approaches can create space for further dialogue and progress.

**Chapter Six** explores artistic attempts to reappropriate space and identity in Republika Srpska. As my research highlights, much like Kozara, Republika Srpska more broadly is a particularly controversial and contested space in contemporary Bosnia. It has also seen some innovative creative approaches to reworking elements of identity and space in the region. Building on the previous chapter's engagement with questions surrounding the multiple narratives of contested spaces, this chapter goes further to highlight the entanglement of art and politics; and the ways that challenges to politics from a knowledge of situatedness within it may be more effective than naïve beliefs that it is possible to work outside of these structures.

**Chapter Seven** examines the antipolitics of humour in contemporary Bosnian art practices and moves beyond the borders of Republika Srpska to the wider regional scene. Through a comparison of humour in Yugoslavia and its role in postwar Bosnia, I highlight the ways in which it is essential to deepen our understandings of Bosnia as a place, and challenge both the regional stereotypes outlined by scholars such as Todorova (2009) and Goldsworthy (2013), and traditional approaches to trauma.

**Chapter Eight** is less a discussion of art practices than an exploration of the networks and spaces that emerge around them. This part of my research is a direct challenge to discourses of fragmentation in postwar Bosnia and moves the literature forward by going beyond analysis of the constructed nature of ethnic fragmentation in the region to directly engage with alternative patterns of organisation. The research calls for new approaches to questions of temporality and the sustainability of inter-cultural tolerance.

**Chapter Nine** concludes the thesis with an examination of Yugonostalgia and its practical applications in the field of culture. This moves the literature on fragmentation forward by exploring the ways that artists and cultural workers are working on alternative models of cultural policy that go beyond ethnic borders, and that could be practically applied across a number of fields. It also demonstrates the complexities of Yugonostalgia in the region, presenting it as a practical tool for reimagining the future as opposed to a static longing for the past.

## **Chapter Two: Rethinking place and identity in Bosnia**

### **Introduction**

Existing literature in the social sciences and humanities has explored the political and spatial fragmentation of Bosnia in great detail. I first examine the literature on imagining the Balkans (Bakic-Hayden, 1995; Goldsworthy, 2013; Todorova, 2009), which is essential to inform the subsequent discussion of how people, politics and conflict in Bosnia have been framed within a certain discourse that in turn results in a certain response or analysis of the country today. To explore responses to the conflict and fragmentation further, I focus strongly on political geography and, in particular, critical geopolitics studies to demonstrate how work in this field has been key in deconstructing the processes that altered the distribution of power and space in Bosnia, but fall short of offering any alternative narratives or engagement with the people affected by such processes. Drawing on critiques from feminist and subaltern geopolitics scholars, I explore the alternative ways in which it might be possible to engage further with issues of fragmentation in contemporary Bosnia. The emphasis is currently still very much on division and what went wrong in the past. I argue that there needs to be a bridging of this focus with more proactive approaches that take into account alternative practices in the region. The specific practices I am engaging with are artistic, contributing to the emerging geographical interest in this area.

### **Images of the Balkans in the Western imagination**

The contemporary image of Bosnia and its citizens cannot be studied in isolation. As Maria Todorova's (2009) socio-historical study of the formation of a Balkan identity within the Western imagination demonstrates, the narrow framework in which the region is frequently discussed is not limited to Bosnia, the former Yugoslavia or even a specific time period. Her ideas have been expanded on in the fields of literature (Goldsworthy, 2013), anthropology (Jezernik, 2003) and popular geopolitics (Dodds, 2003), all of which highlight a tradition throughout history and across media of placing what is an extremely large region within a broad set of stereotypes. Todorova (2009) proposes that these stereotypes act as a contemporary extension of the Orientalist theme, which impact both international and regional perceptions of the Balkans. This is significant to my research because it highlights some of the pitfalls for academic studies in the region. Todorova (2009) helps us to have a more reflexive



understanding of the different positionalities and influences present in representations of it. Balkan imaginations also function geographically and have had implications for the way that the region was perceived both during and following the breakup of Yugoslavia. As Alex Jeffrey (2007, p. 251) notes in his article on the role of NGOs in Bosnia, ‘how places are imagined creates political and spatial realities.’ It is therefore necessary to explore both the imaginations of Bosnia and the ‘political and spatial realities’ these produce. But also, as this research further explores, the alternative ‘political and spatial realities’ produced by imaginations outside of formal political actors.

Western perceptions of Balkan identity are a continuation of ideas prevalent as early as the 1700s, which view the region as a dangerous interzone between East and West based on stereotypes of an inherent Balkan personality, thus following the patterns of Othering outlined by Said’s (1979) *Orientalism*, but very often excluded from this field of analysis. Orientalism deals with the cultural production by the West of an Oriental Other, which perpetuated stereotypes and justified colonial projects. Building on this, Todorova (2009) explores the construction of the Balkans as a European Other across various media<sup>2</sup> and how this has contributed to a negative Balkanist discourse that limits our understanding of the complexities present within the countries that make up the broader region. As Vesna Goldsworthy (2013, para p.5) elaborates in her literary analysis of this discourse, ‘Balkan’ and its variants became derogatory terms: synonyms for violent, divided, backwards and so on. Analysing some classics in popular British fiction, from *Dracula* to Agatha Christie, she demonstrates how people from the Balkans are rarely present in Western European literature and when they are, it is often in the role of the villain or primitive/peasant. Similarly, in the field of popular geopolitics, Klaus Dodds (2003) has explored the geopolitical processes connected to Balkanism and their reflection in James Bond movies. Like Goldsworthy (2013), Dodds (2003, p. 138) notes a prevalence of depictions of people and places within the region as being ‘vulnerable to violent behavior, tribal loyalties and claustrophobia.’ This becomes problematic not only due to the derogatory nature of these depictions, but also because as Dodds (2003) highlights, these stereotypes are very rarely questioned and reflect a popular imagination of the Balkans. Discourse and public perceptions therefore become mutually reinforcing.

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<sup>2</sup> Travelogues, journalism, political discourse and so on.

What I would argue is uniquely problematic about Balkanism compared to Orientalism is its comparative contemporary prevalence and the lack of evolution this set of stereotypes has undergone. The Balkan characters examined by Goldsworthy (2013) and Dodds (2003) are present in contemporary journalistic portrayals. Western news coverage of the region is very much focused on violence, homophobia, criminal activities (for example, the Pink Panther jewelry thief ring), political ineptitude/dogmatism and so on. So Goldsworthy's (2013) critique of the exclusionary attitude towards European countries in postcolonial studies perhaps highlights a need to attend to this stereotyping in the same ways that Orientalism has done. By this I do not mean that racial profiling and stereotyping in the postcolonial context has been fully dealt with, but to some extent it is less socially acceptable or fixed as the image of the Balkans remains today and there is a whole disciplinary field dedicated to the deconstruction of these narratives and processes that the Balkans are somewhat excluded from: postcolonial studies. The few scholars who have attended to the topic of Balkanism (Bakic-Hayden, 1995; Dodds, 2003; Goldsworthy, 2013; Todorova, 2009; Wolff, 1994) demonstrate a striking degree of continuity in Balkanist discourse and a general lack of questioning amongst Western audiences. My research is not only informed by studies of Balkanist discourse, but also builds on existing studies by engaging with creative responses to such discourses.

Western imaginations of the Balkans have also bred much confusion within the region. Todorova (2009, p. 47) describes the Balkan condition as being one of 'ambiguity', poised between East and West but also in a transitional post-socialist and, in the case of Bosnia, post-conflict condition. She argues that this multi-layered liminal status has led to a sense amongst some of being 'a-national', a category ascribed to them to some extent by Western Othering. There also exists a process of internal Othering that Bakic-Hayden (1995, p. 920) argues extends from imposed Western ideas of Europeaness, through which 'many Balkan self-identities have been constructed in direct opposition to an *actual* oriental other, i.e., the Ottoman Turks.' She states that in the context of Yugoslavia, this internal Othering was merged with the nationalist discourses that preceded the violent wars of the nineties. Through an analysis of poems, songs and political discourse, Bakic-Hayden (1995) demonstrates how in Yugoslavia this discourse of Othering created a self-defined internal hierarchy

in which Croatia and Slovenia defined their inherent Europeanness in contrast to the “more Slavic” Serbs, who in turn defined their status in contrast to the “Turks” i.e. the Muslim population, viewed as traitors due to the maintenance of their faith, which came to be identified as solidarity with the conversions forced by the Ottomans during their imperial rule.

The ways in which Balkanist discourses have been constructed connect with questions of how conflicts in the former Yugoslavia were framed, but also what standards are placed on post-conflict communities and their agency. On the one hand, the international community has viewed the Balkans as “primitive”, “violent”, “medieval”. Yet at the same time, the region is expected to evolve into a collection of more tolerant societies than the West itself is. In this way the international community places itself in a somewhat patronising and moralising role, and prevents real effective change by denying individual agency. I find Bakic-Hayden’s (1995, p. 917) comment that the East ‘is (viewed as) much more a project than a place’ very insightful in the context of my own research. Drawing parallels between colonial civilising projects and international community involvement in Bosnia may seem extreme but I believe that a similar logic of “nannying” is prevalent in both: the idea that the East needs teaching or helping in some way that places European countries on a hierarchy akin to those hierarchical processes seen in Orientalism. Jeffrey (2007) does not go as far as to equate international community involvement with colonial/Balkanist logic but he does discuss the somewhat disconnected and patronising approach of international funders and NGOs towards Bosnian citizens and their needs. For example, he draws on critiques of Bosnian understandings of Western funding logic and the assumption by certain international actors that Bosnian citizens do not know what is best for them (Jeffrey, 2007, pp. 256–266).

As I will go on to demonstrate in the following sections, attempts to explain the Balkans and political maneuvering around it have led to misguided and ineffective interventions by the international community. An acknowledgment of the longevity of such perceptions and explanations is essential in addressing them. Through an acknowledgement of the processes of Othering present in Western perceptions of Bosnia and an engagement with artistic practices in the region, my research

contributes to the rethinking process started by Todorova (2009) by moving the focus beyond discourse analysis.

### **Framing the conflict**

Building on Todorova's (2009) theory of Balkanist discourse, I will now draw on a range of literature from geography, sociology, history and politics/international relations in order to examine the role of the state, society and the international community in constructing ethno-nationalist narratives around the former Yugoslavia from the 1990s to the present. There has been much academic focus on the nature and causes of nationalist politics and conflict more broadly, and in the former Yugoslavia specifically. Studies within the social sciences have examined the cultural, linguistic, ethnic and political aspects of what forms a nation and/or nationalism, but with differing views and focuses. They are crucial in countering ethnically essentialised accounts, therefore providing examples of the Balkanist discourse in action and how we might move beyond it. The aim of my research is to move beyond deconstructing old narratives of war and ethnicity however in order to do so, such narratives must be addressed.

The sociologist Rogers Brubaker has examined ethnicity, race and nationalism extensively. I find his concept of the group particularly useful, through which he examines the need to step outside of the standard group format when assessing nationalism (Brubaker, 2002). He believes grouping is a simple way for people to try to understand complex situations, such as nationalist conflict, and does not distinguish between the ethnic organisation and the ethnic individual/group. In the context of Bosnia this would mean that the ethno-political structures (organisations) are merged with ethnic groups and individuals (Serb, Croat, Muslim), which ignores heterogeneity amongst groups. Historian Glenda Sluga (2002) looks at a different but related element of simplification in our understanding of nationalism by exploring the ways that Western Europe tends to view nationalism in Eastern Europe. She argues, like Todorova (2009), that there is an Orientalist distinction operating amongst the international community and, to some extent, Western academia between the perceived ability of Western European nations to accommodate plural identities, and the exclusive and violent nationalisms of Eastern Europe. Sluga (2002) highlights how using these distinctions masks the individually complex nature of nationalisms and

nationalist conflicts, which in turn relegates them to the realm of tribal hatreds and thus irresolvable.

Exploring further the role of the state in constructing nationalist identities, the international relations scholar V. P. Gagnon (2004) implies that ethnicity-based nationalism is a product, rather than a cause of conflict. He argues that violence is related to the threat of loss of power, and the desire to avoid 'political pluralism and popular mobilization ... (by) *demobilizing* key parts of their (elite groups) population' (Gagnon, 2004, p. 7). One method of doing this is to reconstruct society's values and beliefs in a way that benefits elites by removing competition. The best way to eliminate such competition and 'to impose homogeneity onto existing, heterogeneous spaces is through massive violence' (Gagnon, 2004, p. 9). Gagnon (2004, p. 11) highlights the fact that such goals can never be wholly achieved, but that through political dialogue conflict is viewed as ethnic because 'it is taking place within a discourse of ethnicity.' He argues that identity was changed through conflict. Prior to violence, Bosnians were to some extent simultaneously Bosnian, Yugoslav, and Serb/Croat/Muslim. However, through 'the construction of homogeneous *political* space' (Gagnon, 2004, p. 9), the populations came to be viewed as made up of competing, pure ethnicities with ties to their respective newly ethnicised territories. Cultural explanations of ethnic violence would suggest that these views preceded conflict however, if this were true and the sole cause of conflict was ethnicity, then logic would suggest that conflict would have occurred earlier. These are important issues to think through because although ethnicity was brought somewhat to the fore through conflict, this is still not a simple relationship, despite being frequently presented as such.

Another pitfall when analysing Bosnia is that despite the complex and constructed nature of identities, the framings and responses of the international community to crisis in the region were connected with a desire to place it in a context that fit the traditional European concept of state and nationhood. As Norton (2006) argues, identity has been inextricably linked to territory in the modern world, physical territory is changed to match political ideologies, and every element of cultural production and distribution is contested space that affects the control of individual groups (para Jordan and Weedon, 1994, pp. 4–8). In her anthropological examination

of identities in post-Dayton Bosnia, Hromadzic (2013, p. 265) has stated that the Yugoslav concept of being simultaneously different and the same, together and individual, was ‘not a concept easily translatable into (this) Western idea of a nation.’ It was therefore easier for the West to facilitate a transition into demarcated “ethnic” territories despite the fact that this de facto meant supporting the very same groups that initiated violence in the region.

Here I will bring in scholars from the field of critical geopolitics. Employing a post-structuralist approach to geopolitics as a discursive practice, Gearoid Ó Tuathail (1996, p. 192) has argued that during the Bosnian conflict, ‘two competing scripts struggled to enframe it within the U.S. geopolitical imagination.’ The first related to Bosnia as a modern day Holocaust and the second viewed it as a ‘dangerous military quagmire’(Ó Tuathail, 1996, p. 192). The latter perception was linked to the ‘established literary device that has conveyed the Balkans as a space of deviance, conflict and enmity positioned at the margins of Europe’(Jeffrey, 2013, p. 63). During the wars it was framed in a discourse of tribal ethnic hatreds (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Todorova, 2009), which is a clear reflection of Balkanist discourse. This bred trepidation and uncertainty from the international community both because of this ‘clan rivalry’ perception, and the fact that ‘there were no countries in the usual sense’ (Ó Tuathail, 1996, p. 207). This is something I will explore further in the following section, in which I outline how underlying perceptions of the conflict shaped the outcome of spatial fragmentation, before moving on to examine how the concepts of space, power and identity in contemporary Bosnia might be reconceptualised.

### **Dayton and the processes of spatial fragmentation**

Critical geopolitics is especially useful when exploring the controversies of the Dayton Agreement and post-Dayton Bosnia. Scholars from this field have expanded studies of identity construction and political fragmentation in the region to explore the processes of spatial fragmentation, and the extent to which these are interrelated (Campbell, 1999; Robinson et al, 2001; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). The focus for this section will be on ideas surrounding partition and the physical alteration of spaces within the newly defined borders of Bosnia.

The primary debate framing peace and post-conflict strategies in Bosnia was whether

to keep it united as a country or allow it to divide into separate entities (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Bose 2002), with most decisions following Dayton favouring the latter (Bose, 2002). The Dayton Agreement was a peace agreement drawn up by international arbiters and signed by the heads of three of the Yugoslav secessionist states,<sup>3</sup> which ended the war in Bosnia in 1995. It separated the Bosnian map into distinct “ethnic” enclaves with very little overlap, and further aligned some sections of the country with their respective competing ‘mother-states’ (Bose, 2002). The two entities of the country are the Federation (largely Croat and Bosniak) and Republika Srpska (largely Serb), and Brčko district exists as a self-governing administrative unit (under mixed Federation/Republika Srpska administration). Below (figure 2.1) is a map that illustrates the borders of the entity system.



*Figure 2.1: Map of Bosnia. Pink areas indicate Republika Srpska, blue indicates Federation, Brčko is mixed to reflect its mixed administration*

<sup>3</sup> Franjo Tudjman, Croatia; Slobodan Milošević, (what was at the time) Serbia and Montenegro (now separate countries); and the Bosnian (or, perhaps more accurately, Bosniak) representative, Alija Izetbegović

The Federation is divided into ten cantons (see figure 2.2 below), all with administrative power, whereas Republika Srpska and Brčko operate only through their respective central and local municipal governments. To sum up the complexity, there are five levels of government in Bosnia: state, entity, canton, municipality, and there still exists the high representative for Bosnia, representing the international peacekeeping presence in the country. In order to accommodate each ethnic group, there is a tripartite presidency with a rotating chair role, representing the three majority ethnic groups (Muslim, Serb and Croat). State level government is practically non-existent, which leads to significant confusion and inertia. Ministries for culture, education and so on operate on a canton and municipal level with no central state authority. In principle this might sound ideal, offering greater autonomy for local governments to fit policies to the needs of individual communities. In practice, it becomes an excuse for a lack of accountability and for confusion over who citizens and workers can consult, which in turn leads to inaction and crisis across several sectors, one of which is culture, the focus of my research.



Figure 2.2: Map displaying the canton structure of Bosnia



In some ways, a confusing political system is nothing new for Bosnia. As historian John Lampe (2000, p. 313) writes, Yugoslavia had one of ‘the most complicated electoral system seen anywhere during the twentieth century. Few Yugoslavs ever understood it fully or felt that they received any real representation under it.’ During Yugoslavia, there were also many layers of government and constitutional changes over the years. Tito headed up the Central Committee and there were additionally Republic governments, Workers Councils, Youth Councils and municipal governments, all of whom were involved in both local and state decision-making to a greater or lesser extent (Andjelić, 2003; Jeffrey, 2013; Lampe, 2000; Rogan, 2000; Rusinow, 1977). As both Jeffrey (2013) and Rogan (2000) highlight, municipal and Republic governments had a great deal of control over local issues such as hospitals, transportation and taxes, but additionally ‘each [Republic] had a central bank and separate police, educational and judicial systems’ (Jeffrey, 2013, p. 60).

As historian Noel Malcolm (1996, p. 202) states, constant decentralisation was ‘creating more problems than it was solving’, but as long as there were still central strategies coming from both the Central Committee and the Bosnian League of Communists based in Sarajevo, the system still functioned. The complicated system of decentralisation in Yugoslavia undoubtedly laid the foundations of the current political structure of Bosnia and once Yugoslavia fell, so too did Bosnia’s ability to operate as a unified state. The key difference between the current and Yugoslav systems, however, is that the underlying principle in the current system is division whereas previous systems were aimed at unification. Previous complications were based on the near-impossible goal of negotiating the balance between a unified state, and recognition and allowances for its six republics and two autonomous provinces. Additionally, the centre during Yugoslavia had a stronger hold and plans for development. Today the political structure of Bosnia tends to block decisions because it attempts to appease everyone by operating via consensus, which due to ethno-nationalist rivalries usually ends up pleasing no one.

Having outlined the borders and political structures that were entrenched in 1995, I will now explore how fragmentation has been conceptualised in the field of political geography but more specifically, critical geopolitics. I engage particularly with the works of Jeffrey (2007; 2013), Campbell (1999), and Toal and Dalhman (2011).

These scholars, especially Campbell (1999), note how moderates were excluded from internationally-orchestrated peace dialogues due to a desire to follow neorealist partition strategies that were viewed as the simplest way to end the conflict. These strategies followed the logic of some of the ethnic narratives outlined in the previous section, contributing to the erasure of contesting narratives. Campbell (1999) highlights the culpability of the international community in the framing of the conflict and thus the response. He argues that the partition response followed a Balkanist logic that excluded contradictory accounts as incompatible or unachievable, despite international community attitudes following the war promoting a Western conception of multi-ethnicity. Campbell (1999) therefore argues that the problematisation of Bosnia by the international community has always been ethnic even if it has not always been framed as such.

As Painter and Jeffrey (2009, p. 212) highlight, geopolitical attitudes to Bosnia meant ‘that the entire population was condemned to a status as aggressors *and* victims.’ However at the same time they note that within the former Yugoslavia, these narratives ‘have been resisted and reconfigured by individuals and institutions outside the spheres of state power’ (Painter and Jeffrey, 2009, p. 213). Alex Jeffrey has gone on to explore the idea of state constructions in Bosnia through his concept of performance in *The Improvised State* (2013). Here he posits that ‘states are improvised and that their legitimacy and ability to lay claim to rule rely on a capacity to perform their power’ (Jeffrey, 2013, p. 2). In the case of Bosnia, he argues that the nature of this performance is intensified due to the conflict between ‘multiple competing claims to state sovereignty’ (Jeffrey, 2013, p. 3). Using this concept he examines the importance of analysing the processes involved in these competing claims and the possibilities to explore alternatives. Additional to highlighting the role of internal and external practices in the maintenance of this ‘improvisation’, Jeffrey (2013) also hints at the agency of Bosnian citizens. He is one of the only scholars working on power structures in Bosnia to argue for this, however I do not think he takes his research as far as to engage with this agency. His thoughtful engagement and rigorous methodological approach to researching the various performances of the state in Bosnia have implications for how geographical studies might move forward. However, he still focuses on actors in the political and legal realms: NGOs, state courts and so on. I believe that more could be done by shifting Jeffrey’s analytical and

methodological approach to groups and actors not considered as traditionally political or as involved in state-building. By engaging with art practices, my research also demonstrates how artists in Bosnia are disrupting and reworking the various performances of the state.

Exploring the cartographic and statistical manipulation used by nationalist politicians in the destruction and (re)construction of identities in Bosnia, Campbell (1999) argues that countering partition along these identity lines involves more than simply examining the ways in which boundaries and demographics have changed. For him it is the underlying processes that led to 'the problematization of identity and the power relations which effected the division in the first place' (Campbell, 1999, p. 427) that must be explored. He therefore pushes for a focus on the broader systems in which boundary-making processes take place. Toal and Dahlman's (2011) analysis adds additional layers to this, arguing that following partition, it was necessary for the spaces within these borders to be altered to fit the new "ethnic" narratives of belonging. This involved the systematic targeting of community buildings and documents as much as people, in attempts to remove all traces of a mixed past, also discussed in the work of Jeffrey (2007), Coward (2002), and Robinson et al. (2001). I would now like to explore this concept in two locations in Bosnia: Sarajevo, the capital and part of the Federation; and Prijedor, a city and municipality in the North-Western part of Bosnia that is now part of Republika Srpska, and my main focus site. Additionally, I would like to bring in international politics scholar Martin Coward's (2002) concept of 'urbicide' in Mostar, which frames the destruction of buildings and spaces in a slightly different way to those in political geography.

Robinson et al (2001) explore the remaking of Sarajevo and the construction of Muslim identity following the siege of the city. This was a four-year period in which Serb paramilitary forces surrounded Sarajevo, regularly firing shells and using snipers to attack its inhabitants, as well as cutting off vital supplies such as water, gas and electricity. Additional to the attacking forces being Serbs, it is important to note that Serbs were also inhabitants of Sarajevo. The siege was therefore ideologically rather than ethnically driven. Although there has been 'a less clearly stated link between the Muslims and a well-defined territorial claim' (Robinson et al., 2001, p. 964), patterns similar to those identified in analyses of processes of spatial reconstruction by Serb

and Croat nationalists can be seen in Islamic contexts. Robinson et al's (2001) study explores how a largely Muslim and Croat committee in Sarajevo renamed many of the streets to remove both Serb and Yugoslav traces, reverting back to Ottoman names. As their research demonstrates, these processes are mirrored in the design of the currency and various societies and institutions established to make a Bosnian (subtext, Muslim) history. Whilst these processes are not violent or expansionist, and relate more to post-conflict responses to legacies of violence, the political implications are similar to those in more violent wartime contexts. They erase a certain group – Serbs, perceived universally in this context as aggressors – from the history and space of Sarajevo. This is significant because in the majority of studies on the reconstruction of space in Bosnia, the focus is often on Serb tactics.

I will now explore a more violent site in which these processes took place: the case of Prijedor. Prijedor is a municipality and town in North West Bosnia, in what is now Republika Srpska. In the 1991 census, the two largest ethnic groups in Prijedor municipality were Muslims and Serbs, with a sizeable Croat and Yugoslav minority (Belloni, 2005, p. 435). As with many municipalities, or possibly even more so, the war had a dramatic impact on this demographic make-up. Richard Holbrooke, an American diplomat working in the Balkans from the mid to late nineties, even included Prijedor in a list of 'towns that have become symbols of ethnic cleansing' (Belloni, 2005, p. 435). Three of the detention camps in which Bosnian Muslims were held by Serb paramilitary forces were located within the municipality: Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje; and 'it is estimated that aside from Srebrenica, Prijedor is the municipality in Bosnia where the political programme of ethnic purification by Serb nationalists was the most systematic and murderous, with at least 3100 people killed and missing'<sup>4</sup> (Moll, 2012, p. 194). It could be viewed as a prime example of Toal and Dahlman's (2011) discussion of Bosnia as a systematically and violently destroyed landscape, as in addition to the killed and missing, 'more than 35 000 of Prijedor's Bosniaks ... (and) 6300 Bosnian Croats fled ... during the war' (UNDP 2004, 12). The town of Kozarac is located around 10km from the main town of Prijedor and is predominantly Muslim. During the war it was attacked and as Sebina Sivac-Bryant (2016, p. 30) describes:

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<sup>4</sup> 'on estime qu'après Srebrenica, Prijedor est la municipalité de Bosnie- Herzégovine où la politique d'épuration ethnique des nationalistes serbes a été la plus systématique et la plus meurtrière, avec au moins 3 100 personnes tuées et portées disparues.'

over two days, several thousand people were killed before survivors were gathered in the stadium and then dispatched to the camps. The entire town was burnt, and then remnants of houses were bulldozed to prevent people ever coming back.

The municipality of Prijedor therefore offers a key example of the dramatically altered landscapes of Bosnia during the war.

Both Sarajevo and Prijedor highlight the importance placed on the structure of space by nationalist actors. In sociological studies on imagining identity, theories that ‘visible markers of positive self-image are monuments, flags, street names, national holidays, festivals, museums, songs, literature and poetry, and history in schools’ (Oberschall, 2010, p. 18) are common. So-called visible markers are highly contested in the Balkans, where academics often view these processes as being linked to the broader nation-building strategies of competing nation(alist) states, which connects with Jeffrey’s (2013, p. 2) concept that ‘performance is at the heart of attempts to convey state legitimacy.’ Spaces in Bosnia have been altered to perform an identity that legitimates certain ethnic narratives of ownership. However, my research shows how an examination of art practices in the region can demonstrate alternatives to this performance of state legitimacy in Prijedor.

Drawing on the case of Mostar, the main city in the Herzegovina region, Martin Coward (2002) argues that the destruction of cities during the war was more coordinated than symbolic suggestions imply. Of course, the erasure of spaces marked as belonging to targeted ethnic groups is somewhat coordinated. However, Coward (2002) argues that in cities across Bosnia, it was an attempt not to erase certain ethnic markers on the landscape, but rather heterogeneity:

In genocide, it is the existence of an ethnic/national group that is at stake, whereas in urbicide it is the existence of the heterogeneity that comprises the urban/urbanity that is at stake (Coward, 2002, p. 35)

Whilst political geography has drawn on Coward's theory (See Jeffrey, 2007), the focus tends to be more on the total erasure of a certain group in the Bosnian landscape. This by default attacks heterogeneity but Coward's focus on the direct and coordinated attack on the urban environment as a symbol of heterogeneity indicates a more nuanced approach to the study of the cleansing of the Bosnian landscape. If Coward's (2002, p. 40) research explores the destruction of heterogeneity through the removal of shared spaces, my research extends this examination to the recreation of urbanity and shared spaces through contemporary art practices.

In sum, it is certainly difficult to reverse what has been done to the landscapes and peoples of Bosnia but this is where the approach of young artists may provide useful tools for reimagining the future of the country. Carabelli's (2013, p. 48) sociological study of youth activism in Mostar notes that many 'young activists draw on the past to critically imagine how a different future could be built', creating a process where the past is reinterpreted and renegotiated in an attempt to include but not dwell on this idea of the traumatic event or idealised past as key definers of the present. In the context of my own research, this is shown as a central characteristic in many projects by Bosnian artists and cultural workers too. Mladen Miljanović,<sup>5</sup> for example, aims 'to reveal a new relation towards art, the experienced past but also the current reality' (Vujkovic, 2008). As art historian Sarita Vujkovic (2008) argues, he does this by fully recognising and engaging with the past, as someone who both survived and served in the war, embodying the roles and experiences that have shaped him whilst at the same time attempting to re/decontextualise their meaning. As I will further show, geography is intrinsic to the work of Miljanović and others, and essential to the kind of politics it might be said to propose.

### **Responding to fragmentation**

Following on from my discussion of Dayton and the fragmentation of space, I will now examine literature from the fields of politics and political geography on responses to this fragmentation, mostly from the international community. This will be examined first, by exploring ideas of tolerance and integration, followed by an examination of transitional justice and reconciliation measures. These have been key

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<sup>5</sup> Representative for the Bosnian pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale

practices in addressing the effects of war but as an engagement with the literature shows, there are significant gaps that need to be addressed.

In her ethnographic study of Muslim identity in Bosnia, anthropologist Tone Bringa (1995) considers the complexities inherent in ideas of tolerance and intolerance. She argues that Bosnia, like any place, cannot be romanticised as an historically harmonious multicultural society, despite not following the logics of ethnic hatred narratives either. This highlights questions for researchers of how we view tolerance and subsequently, fragmentation in post-conflict societies. As Campbell (1999) notes, there is a degree of hypocrisy amongst the international community in terms of the notion of multi-ethnicity or tolerance, which favoured nationalist goals to establish peace but now criticises the same policies it helped to entrench. I would extend the concept of international community hypocrisy to include the notion that the degree of multi-ethnic tolerance expected of Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly is of a higher level than that which exists in Western societies. This links to the ideas of tolerance described by political scientist Wendy Brown in her 2008 book exploring the concept. Brown (2008, p. 6) puts forward the concept of tolerance as discourse, used in

the legitimization of a new form of imperial state action in the twenty-first century, a legitimization tethered to a constructed opposition between a cosmopolitan West and its putatively fundamentalist Other. Tolerance thus emerges as part of a civilizational discourse.

She discusses the role of tolerance in the post-9/11 strategies of the West in the War on Terror but her ideas can be applied to Western strategies and attitudes towards the former Yugoslavia. In this case, the Other is not so much ‘fundamentalist’ but rather wild and uncontrollable. It is the tolerant liberal West’s job to help them become otherwise.

Most importantly in Brown’s (2008) analysis is the point that tolerance discourse does not actually promote integration or challenge hatreds in any society, and in fact entrenches ideas of difference by drawing further attention to it. General tolerance in terms of absence of hate speech, violence and so on is of course desirable in any

society, but as Brown (2008) identifies, tolerance as political discourse distorts and condones violent actions, and reduces entire nations to stereotypes. This is not to say that conflicts and divisions in postwar Bosnia should be ignored or excused, but rather that they should not be exoticised through the constructions of ideas of ‘tolerance as a civilizational discourse that draws from and entwines postcolonial, liberal and neoliberal reasoning’ (Brown, 2008, p. 202). Such framings have led to limited perceptions of Bosnia and neocolonial responses by the international community. This is a further reflection of the Balkanist discourse outlined by Todorova (2009), as it demonstrates a projection of non-realised Western ideals onto the Balkan Other. The European Union and international community more broadly places demands on the countries of the former Yugoslavia that its own countries do not meet in order for them to gain membership and acceptance into mainstream global structures. But they extoll these virtues more broadly to reflect their own actions towards the region in a certain light.

Although accepting the complexities of tolerance as a term, Toal & Dahlman (2011) still employ it in their examination of post-conflict (re)integration. They put forward the argument that previous conditions of tolerance in the region were due to the fact that ‘(d)ifference was constantly encountered and negotiated in public spaces’ (Toal and Dahlman, 2011, p. 48). If it is therefore their opinion that difference is no longer encountered in public spaces, they clearly place the attainment of tolerance in an unreachable position. However, it is unclear to what extent physical separation or homogenisation affects matters. As Oberschall (2010, p. 6) notes, from a psycho-sociological perspective, ‘people tend to talk politics within homogenous clusters.’ Removing the spaces in which heterogeneous encounters can take place certainly has an impact but to assume that it is a principal block is quite a simplified view of intercultural relations. I would take this even further and say that it is an oversimplification to assume that these spaces do not exist. To view spaces of encounter as fixed and demographically determined is to ignore the significance of the constantly changing, temporary spaces that emerge through various networks. Maintaining a focus on more politically defined spaces is something that political geography needs to move beyond. My research contributes to this field by providing an account of the alternative spaces created through artistic practices and networks.



An acknowledgement of the processes of identity construction, political and spatial fragmentation, and their interrelatedness is essential in terms of deconstructing certain persistent narratives of the Balkans as a hotbed of ethnic hatreds. However I would argue that in the literature on post-Dayton Bosnia there is still too much focus on what can be broadly termed as *transitional justice* and *reconciliation*. These are the key concepts mobilised by the international community but as an examination of the literature shows, such approaches to post-conflict societies are often shallow and procedural at best. In international relations/political studies, transitional justice mechanisms mostly focus on formal reparations processes (Dragović-Soso, 2010). Two of the key processes in this framework through which Bosnia is currently examined are those of returns/resettlement programmes, and truth and reconciliation commissions. In terms of returns programmes, when discussing Annex 7 of the General Framework Agreement, Toal & Dahlman (2011, p. 7) note that although it deals with the right to return and property, it includes countless other clauses ‘consolidating the triumph of *homelands*, the ethnoterritorial ethnocracies that had displaced them in the first place.’ Annex 7 therefore embodies a paradox that makes a genuine reversal of the physical processes of war an impossible task. In an article that preceded their book on the legacy of ethnic cleansing, Dahlman and Ó Tuathail (2005) use the municipality of Zvornik as a primary example of the problems of return. This is a good example of the international community’s dilemma in the resettlement programme: it wanted displaced people to return to their pre-war homes and properties following the war but was unable to provide the necessary safeguards. In Zvornik incidents of riots, arson and intimidation towards returnees were unlikely to encourage the largely reluctant displaced population to resettle in the municipality, and the international community was impotent to control it. Through analysis of this process, Dahlman and Ó Tuathail (2005) demonstrate the contradictory nature of international community goals and involvement in resettlement: a desire to be involved but an inability to fully commit.

To return briefly to Prijedor in the context of this issue. As I discussed previously, it was a site of extreme violence and largely fit Toal and Dahlman’s (2011) model of ethnic cleansing but paradoxically, Prijedor experienced one of the most rapid and earliest rates of refugee return without international help or initiatives (Belloni, 2005). The municipality also saw the completion of the first reconstructed mosque in

Republika Srpska in August 2000, in the very same town of such large-scale destruction: Kozarac (Belloni, 2005; Sivac-Bryant, 2016). Returns and reconstruction were not without problems but they did not require the international community to assist. In fact, in her book *Re-making Kozarac*, Sivac-Bryant (2016) demonstrates how the international community was in fact more of a block to returns, as they were more focused on avoiding violence and controversy than assisting returnees. As she rather scathingly remarks: 'the outward appearance of seeking justice is easier and more rewarding than the hard work of real-world social repair' (Sivac-Bryant, 2016, p. 15). In the case of Kozarac, women's organisations and displaced communities themselves were key in initiating returns, despite threats to their safety.

Prijedor's unusual pattern of destruction and reconstruction therefore demonstrates the complexity surrounding analyses of ethnic cleansing and its reversal in Bosnia. High levels of violence in an area do not necessarily coincide with high levels of unwillingness amongst victim groups to return and international assistance is not always better in these processes than its absence, perhaps indicating the procedural, forced and somewhat ineffective nature of international community responses. It must also be noted that despite the fact that Prijedor is considered to be one of the most successful municipalities in terms of refugee returns and symbolic reconstructions, it remains permanently framed by the international community and Western academia in terms of wartime activities. And although the return of Muslim refugees and reconstruction of Islamic spaces provided a hopeful model, it does not necessarily support the efficacy of concepts such as reconciliation and transitional justice.

In sum Prijedor is a municipality that remains bound up in two competing discourses prevalent in examinations of Bosnia: as a space of nationalist violence representative of the views outlined by Todorova's (2009) concept of Balkanism, and as a postwar reintegration success. Yet it conforms to neither. I think more attention needs to be paid to these complexities, rather than assuming that there is only one model or set of results to judge transition or reconciliation by. The methods of judging reconciliation currently follow a pattern described as 'liberal peace' (Campbell et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2009; Richmond, 2006). This is a term used to analyse what scholars such as Richmond (2006) view as the hierarchical assumptions underlying peacebuilding missions, which homogenise spaces, fail to understand the nuances of peace and often

ignore the real needs of post-conflict societies. The international community places Western understandings of peace, economy, multiculturalism and so on above alternative forms, ignoring the specificities of place and the problems of these models.

Similar issues are evidenced in ideas of truth and reconciliation commissions, which introduce the problems of memory and memorialisation in post-conflict societies. As IR scholar Dragović-Soso (2010) notes, trials judge with a focus on guilt, blame and justice; whereas truth and reconciliation commissions are designed to air grievances. However, the initial catharsis of both is short-lived. Research has also shown how controversies surrounding trials have exacerbated problems between states, and between states and the European Union, and there remain 'deep and enduring problem(s) of divisive and fragmented visions of the recent past throughout the former Yugoslavia, encountered not only on an inter-ethnic level but even within civil societies of the same national group' (Dragović-Soso and Gordy, 2010, p. 201). Such approaches to memory and reconciliation have been imposed by international organisations and the superficial nature of these processes is often very apparent in public sentiments towards them. Dragović-Soso & Gordy (2010, p. 208) state that:

The repeated false starts of 'truth seeking' initiatives underscore the point that it is easier to approach the past procedurally than it is to achieve a cathartic confrontation with it. Transitional justice initiatives have not bridged the cognitive divisions that undermine reconciliation in the region.

This shows the limitations of a focus on reconciliation, which tends to give precedence to the idea that there is a set framework on how to approach these issues that, when followed, will allow all involved to move on. Truth and reconciliation commissions ignore the individuality of memory and miss the reality that the airing of grievances is not always heard or understood in the same way, and therefore not in itself conducive to moving post-conflict societies forward. This is not to say that truth and reconciliation commissions and trials should not take place, but rather that procedural approaches alone are ineffectual in approaching controversial and violent pasts.

Truth commissions and legal processes have also been explored in political geography. For example, Jeffrey and Jakala (2012; 2014; 2015) demonstrate the complex processes and performances involved in postwar trials. They do outline some hope through local initiatives such as RECOM, which is a regional commission working across ex-Yugoslav countries to focus on collective abuse and victimisation (Jeffrey and Jakala, 2012). With an ‘emphasis ... on fostering public debate regarding the role of recent violence in the former Yugoslavia’ (Jeffrey and Jakala, 2012, p. 291), initiatives such as RECOM are able to avoid some of the pitfalls of internationally coordinated trials. However, ‘the involvement of states and their governments can act as a barrier to the establishment of meaningful transnational collaboration’ (Jeffrey and Jakala, 2012, p. 291). This role of states and their governments is a complicating factor in all postwar justice schemes in the former Yugoslavia. Jeffrey and Jakala (2012, p. 293) use an interesting comparison between South Africa and the former Yugoslavia:

truth commissions ... might destabilize nationalist discourses of statehood and belonging in the fledgling successor states to Yugoslavia. This constitutes a key difference between the experience in the former Yugoslavia and South Africa, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission formed part of the state-building narrative.

This again demonstrates the problem of competing narratives in postwar judicial and truth and reconciliation processes. Additional to the problems of retraumatization and distancing of affected communities (Jeffrey and Jakala, 2014), in the former Yugoslavia, the entrenchment of ethno-nationalist elites in the political systems of the successor states also blocks the legitimacy of truth seeking initiatives.

In his sociological study of the changing nature of ethnic relations in the former Yugoslavia, Oberschall (2000) uses a comparative educational model from the experience of Franco-German relations following the Second World War. Here he notes the success of ‘teaching future generations a truthful version of Franco-German history instead of the blatantly nationalist histories and popular culture that the previous generation had been exposed to’ (Oberschall, 2010, p. 33). The presentation of history in post-Dayton Bosnia is very complex and controversial and whilst I would

agree that it is important that perspectives in education and outreach are opened out, the idea that this is a solid peacebuilding tactic is again based on liberal assumptions of truth and its role in educating or healing post-conflict societies. Commenting on the Western prioritisation of truth, historian Anna Sheftel (2011) notes that when studying the former Yugoslavia, we see different relationships to truth are present. In her post-conflict conversations with Sarajevans about their attitude towards Yugoslavia, it was revealed that any nostalgia or faith in the Yugoslav narrative was not based on blind trust or belief that it worked. Many of her respondents were well aware of the lies inherent in the Yugoslav state system but for them it was a lie that functioned to promote a peaceful environment. As Sheftel (2011) notes, this therefore questions the notion of truth and its role in post-Dayton Bosnia. A more careful engagement delinked or in combination with formal ideas and processes might function better in post-conflict contexts, promoting spaces in which differences are present, but not of principal importance or obstruction. As Jeffrey (2013) notes, the humanitarian framework promoted by the international community during the war and in post-conflict Bosnia has led to simplistic and patchy responses that have denied the agency of citizens and the heterogeneity of practices. My research focuses on this agency and heterogeneity, and examines the ways that these can be embodied through art.

Memory has been a key theme in analyses of the construction of space and society in postwar Bosnia. Historians, politicians and the media are in a dialogue of memory construction and distribution, and these are consistently cited as the main forums through which knowledge and memory are filtered. Jeffrey (2013, p. 42) argues that this is problematic when we consider that ‘the writing of history is not a neutral and descriptive exercise; it is a practice that enters into the constitution of the past and lends legitimacy to certain conceptualisations of the present.’ But if it is consistently acknowledged that bottom-up approaches can offer alternative voices or frameworks in which to consider these processes (see for example, Dragović-Soso & Gordy, 2010), it is surprising how much existing work on Bosnia in the field of politics/international relations and political geography still engages with these approaches only at a theoretical level, if at all. It also seems that calls from these fields to examine alternative spaces are framed in the overtly political terms of memory and reconciliation. This is where a focus on art practices and the alternative spaces and identities they perform might have something different to contribute.

### **Rethinking space and identity in Bosnia**

In this section I consider the extent to which recent literature, specifically in feminist, critical and subaltern geopolitics, may provide a useful platform for developing alternative modes of analysing and reconceptualising fragmentation in Bosnia. Feminist approaches to geopolitics tackle the elite-level focus of critical geopolitics directly by exploring different spheres of political activity to include a wider variety of actors and their agency. The merging of subaltern theories and geopolitics championed by Jo Sharp (Sharp, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) explores hybridity amongst these actors to include different forms of knowledge and engagement with alternative practices of politics and space. These studies have been essential in expanding modes of knowledge making and understanding in political geography outside of Western contexts.

Whilst not employing the term ‘subaltern’ directly in my research, I argue that research in this field provides a useful framework for considering non-elites as political agents and exploring the alternative spaces they exist in and create. I begin by outlining feminist geopolitics, which in many ways facilitated an environment in which subaltern studies could come to the fore in geography. I then engage with Subaltern Studies and the various ways it has been employed in geography, with a focus on political geography. I also consider the links between subaltern ideas in geography and the literature on Balkanism. The two fields share many similarities but yield different results, and can therefore learn much from each other. My research explores the benefits of increased engagement between these two unique but related fields.

Following my discussion of the ways that Subaltern Studies has helped to reconceptualise research and methodologies within geography, and its relation to the literature on Balkanism, I then explore how popular geopolitics has attempted to expand studies in political geography outside of elite-level processes. I close the section with an outline of my approach in connection to the emerging body of literature on art and geopolitics.

### *Feminist geopolitics*

Critiques of political geography in critical geopolitics have helped to deconstruct some of the grand narratives concerning identity, nationalism and fragmentation. However, these deconstructions offer ‘little sense of alternative possibilities’ (Dowler and Sharp, 2001, p. 167). Although critical geopolitics accepts that politics may be more interconnected, it still maintains the idea of ‘the territorial state ... (as) the most visible and organised site of political action’ (Slater, 2004, p. 23). As Staeheli (2001) argues, the focus is very much on government(s), official policies, national and international organisations, media representations and so on. There have been attempts to broaden geopolitics to include other voices, such as feminist, subaltern and popular geopolitics, however they have not been applied extensively or explicitly to the context of Bosnia, and certainly not in the postwar context. These theories are very useful when considering issues of representation in Bosnia because they push critical geopolitics to go one step further and engage with the people and issues it discusses. Feminist and subaltern writers argue that geopolitical thinking currently only ‘look(s) at those doing the looking at the maps ... (not) the people *on* the map, much less their agency’ (Koopman, 2011, p. 275). By examining Bosnia through artists, I aim to return some of this agency rather than contribute to the classic war and ethnicity narratives that fail to avoid victim-aggressor cycles.

In order to further discuss the contribution of subaltern approaches to political geography, it is essential to outline feminist geopolitics. By questioning the status quo and looking at broader ideas of power relations (Dalby 1994), feminist geopolitics were in many ways pivotal in facilitating an environment in which subaltern studies could come to the fore in geography. In feminist political and geopolitical theory, attempts have been made to explore the terms *politics* and *political* and the ways in which they relate to each other (Dalby, 1994; Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Slater, 2004). How scholars choose to frame these terms is a big question that is yet to be resolved, and not one that I aim to address extensively in my own research. I do however engage with the ways in which the two have been thought to relate to each other and the implications this has for my work. To bypass the politics/political debate somewhat, I would prefer to focus on the related public/private divide. If Slater (2004) argues that the *political* refers to issues whereas *politics* refers to the institutions or people put in place to control these,

Enloe and Dalby instead focus on the fact that the personal can frequently show us much more about the political than standard arguments in the world of (geo)politics (Dalby, 1994). Art in many ways functions as an interzone between public and private. Whilst it is a public activity, I argue that it can be viewed as a public manifestation of private politics, rather than as public politics in the same way as political parties, NGOs and so on function. This relationship between art, politics and public in Bosnia is something I explore further in my research.

Instead of establishing a divide in terms of what can be considered *politics* or *political*, the focus turns to the spheres in which these terms operate and how they relate to one another. In terms of considering power, feminist approaches expose the fact that this is not merely political, as ‘many different cycles tak(e) place on different time-scales’ (Parker, 1998, p. 151). The private sphere, the body, religion, race and gender all offer alternative spheres of identification and alternative spaces in which to act politically. This highlights the importance of attending to non-elite actors and their agency, which might reveal strong geopolitical tendencies outside of what we currently feel that we “know”, which has been built on extensively by scholars employing a subaltern approach to geopolitics.

Based on the above, scholars such as Koopman (2011) have argued for a compression of the terms defining public and private politics, rather than an either/or situation. This has led to a trend in feminist and subaltern geopolitics of looking at the creation of alternative political spaces around the world. Through explorations of the body as a site of resistance, scholars such as Juliet Fall (2006) and Dowler and Sharp (2001) have demonstrated how we can reinsert agency into political geography. By shifting to a focus on everyday concerns (Dowler and Sharp, 2001) and processes (Staeheli, 2001), these scholars have opened up the modes of analysing a ‘third space’ beyond the either/or dichotomy (Hyndman, 2003, p. 3). In the context of my research, exploring the alternative spheres of identification in Bosnia and the ways that art might offer a ‘third space’ of analysis is of central importance.



### *Subaltern studies and geography*

Subaltern studies emerged in the nineteen eighties as a project led by Dr Ranajit Guha to rewrite or challenge dominant narratives of Indian history at the time (Chakrabarty, 2003; Chaturvedi, 2000; Clayton, 2011; Jazeel, 2014). It was felt by the members of the original Subaltern Studies group that history in this region was caught between two competing narratives – colonial and nationalist – neither of which ‘account[ed] for the dynamic and improvisational modes of peasant political agency’ (Chaturvedi, 2000, p. viii). As O’Hanlon (2000) notes, peasant revolutions were based on their own local experience, for example rents, living costs and local laws; and these local revolutions were often at odds with the national independence movement. The national revolution that led to Indian independence was itself quite hierarchical and the internal Othering of the caste system did not bring liberation for all people (Bayly, 2000). The marginalised groups that made up those remaining oppressed, and the term subaltern more broadly, are often excluded from history and the archives, which further renders them voiceless. Based on these exclusions, subaltern scholars tried to bring the unheard voices of Indian history to the fore by reading ‘for lack, absence and effacement in the colonial archive’ (Jazeel, 2014, p. 96). This has implications for my own research and studies of the Balkans more broadly. As scholars of Balkanism have highlighted, the Balkans have constantly been framed and spoken about by external (Western) powers (see for example Goldsworthy, 2013; Todorova, 2009). This has led to processes of internal Othering (Bakic-Hayden, 1995) similar to those outlined by subaltern scholars, which, as political geographers researching Bosnia have highlighted, has impacted how recent events in the former Yugoslavia have been framed (see for example Campbell, 1999; Jeffrey, 2013). Furthermore, like subjects in India, citizens of the former Yugoslavia have been caught between competing regional and international narratives. The focus on those left out of such narratives taken by scholars of Subaltern Studies is therefore relevant to my own research and has implications for those wishing to challenge the stereotypes and problems outlined in studies of Balkanism.

Whilst Guha and the original Subaltern Studies group highlighted absent voices and histories, and ‘the question of the relationships between texts and power’ (Chakrabarty, 2003, p. 198), the field has since expanded beyond its original focus following critiques from scholars such as Gayatri Spivak (1986), and different

disciplinary applications. Spivak's (1986) critique of Subaltern Studies moved past an exploration of the subaltern's absence in history and other disciplines to explore the limits of writing and speech themselves, and ignorance towards difference amongst subaltern subjects. This led to her famous postulation that, ultimately, the subaltern cannot speak, which is often viewed rather negatively. However, as Jazeel (2014) and Legg (2016) note, Spivak has since altered her position but more importantly, she has emphasised that her critique was not an attempt to promote a defeatist attitude, but rather a call to try to attend to alternative ways of being and speaking.

The question then becomes one of practice: how can we, as Western academics, attend to and include difference? What does such difference add to existing knowledge and forms of knowledge production? And how do 'subaltern understandings of "the centre" translate and transform dominant ones' (Clayton, 2011, p. 252)? Geographers engaging with subaltern theory are exploring these questions further (see for example Chapman, 2016; Jazeel, 2012; Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010) and using them to adapt methodologies to reassert the agency of subaltern subjects (Jazeel, 2013; Legg, 2016; Sharp, 2011a; Staeheli, 2001), to examine the limitations of existing disciplinary language and concepts (Clayton, 2011; Jazeel, 2014), and to reconsider the role of area and regional studies (Chari, 2016; Jazeel, 2017; Robinson, 2003).

A key concern highlighted by Clayton (2011, p. 247) 'is that the idea of the subaltern can be broken into so many pieces that it loses coherence, comparative utility and critical bite.' However, whilst Clayton sounds a note of concern, the diversity of approaches employed by geographers working with subaltern studies ideas have developed a range of important insights. For example, Legg (2010; 2016) and Featherstone (2005; 2015) have engaged with subaltern theories to explore the historical geographies of sex workers in colonial India (Legg, 2010, 2016) and maritime labour networks (Featherstone, 2005, 2015). Chapman (2016), on the other hand, has used subaltern approaches to explore geography education around the world, and Robinson (2011, 2003) has applied them to urban studies. Through this research, geographers have highlighted the role of subaltern groups in global processes (Featherstone, 2015), the more nuanced position of those often placed in

submissive victim categories (Legg, 2016), multi-ethnic cooperation in political struggles (Featherstone, 2005), and the Eurocentric nature of academia (Chapman, 2016; Robinson, 2003, 2011). My own research explores some of the questions raised by subaltern approaches, such as challenging West-centric concepts of both art and Bosnia, as well as engaging with the alternative voices and spaces left out of such conceptions. In particular, I draw on frameworks outlined in subaltern geopolitics, which I will now discuss further.

### *Subaltern geopolitics*

Subaltern geopolitics, in which subaltern theory is employed to deconstruct dominant geopolitical narratives, demonstrates that alternative networks, securities and politics exist alongside more dominant frameworks in research and media. Some examples include Sharp's (2011) examination of Tanzanian media reactions to the war on terror. Through this research she demonstrates positions and alliances outside of the "West versus Islamist terrorist" dichotomy. As Sharp (2011) highlights, opposition towards the US war on terror in Tanzania is not based on support for Islamist terrorist networks, but because they worry about their own security in relation to this new global war. Similarly, Woon (2001, 2014) has explored subaltern geopolitics in relation to the war on terror, but in the context of the Philippines. He explores the geopolitics of fear in relation to the war on terror and how this emotion is used in one non-western context – the Philippines (Woon, 2011). Both Woon (2011, 2014) and Sharp (2011) challenge West-centric approaches to geopolitics by highlighting alternative strategies, agencies and geopolitical concerns. In the context of Bosnia, the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans more broadly, attempts to present these alternative strategies and geopolitical concerns are essential in order to start examining the complexities of these spaces further, rather than simply as spaces that are liminal to the West and broader global processes.

Secor (2001), on the other hand, employs subaltern geopolitics in her study of women from orthodox religious communities in Istanbul, which challenges conventional western conceptions of gender inequality in Islamic culture by engaging with the women directly, rather than assuming their position and strength in society. Her (Secor, 2001) research is an in-depth exploration of Muslim female identity and their ability to act politically. As she highlights, the spaces they create

might not be what we consider political but they make it so and alter our perceptions of what constitutes “political”. Again, this has implications for my own research on the relationship between art, politics and place in Bosnia. Exploring political geography through contemporary art practises reasserts the agency of non-elite actors in the region to highlight alternative spaces of power and solidarity.

Finally, Christopher Harker (2011) explores family structures and spacing in Palestine to demonstrate how issues take on a different level of importance depending on where or how you are situated. From a western perspective we might focus on the violence of the occupation in Palestine (para Harker, 2011, p. 307) but by examining the restructuring of land that results from this and the effects this has on family living structures, Harker (2011) demonstrates the politicisation or problematisation of the everyday. The everyday in this situation becomes political because the traditional living structure was one in which families lived in the same building together, whereas now, due to the further contraction of Palestinian-owned space, some are having to live in more mixed apartment blocks, like those that we are familiar with (Harker 2011). This alters debates about the organisation of space in conflict zones, which offers a micro-level view of the larger spatial alterations of the occupation as seen through the eyes of those affected by it. Harker (2011) also presents alternative but on-the-ground attitudes towards the impacts of violent conflict. Real engagement with subjects may reveal unexpected reactions to traumatic events. This is something that I explore further in my own research.

In sum, two key ways that subaltern studies have been employed in geography are to highlight different agencies and subjects, and to challenge Eurocentric dominance in academia. Subaltern approaches in geography and beyond have implications for studies of the Balkanist discourses that have framed understandings of Bosnia and responses to crisis in the region. Whilst subaltern studies have been incorporated into geographical research in terms of rethinking theory and practice, Balkanism has yet to be explored in the same way. By examining the ways that subaltern studies have challenged notions of history, politics and place, I demonstrate how a similar approach can open up some of these questions in the Balkan context too. Scholars exploring the concept of Balkanism have drawn on postcolonial literature, and particularly Said’s (1979) *Orientalism*, to reveal the processes of Othering that have

occurred in the region; however, they have not engaged extensively with the aims of Subaltern Studies scholars to reinsert agency and multiple voices in academic research. Studies of Balkanism still remain mostly at the level of analysing the processes of oppression, not the agency and heterogeneity of the oppressed.

One exception is the 2002 book *Balkan as Metaphor* (Bjelić and Savić). The contributors do not draw links between the aims of Subaltern Studies scholars and their own, however through engagements with questions of regional representation, they demonstrate the complex nature of identity in the Balkans in contrast to the homogenised and Othered perceptions outlined in analyses of Balkanist discourses. Some examples include explorations of the ways that Balkan stereotypes have been played up in Yugoslav film to acknowledge and subvert such stereotypes (Gourgouris, 2002); the alternative gender solidarities between women in the former Yugoslavia, torn between gender and ethnic identities (Kesić, 2002); and how traditional or folk culture is reclaimed to resist westernisation (Kiossev, 2002). Through this work, scholars have highlighted alternative solidarities to the ethnic ones that are so often emphasised in research on the former Yugoslavia, that Balkan citizens are not merely passive receptors of Balkanist stereotyping, and the ways that they navigate the conflict between neither Othering nor homogenising their own culture.

The majority of the contributions in this book still follow the more passive applications of subaltern approaches, such as textual and cultural analysis. However, the collection represents a significant shift towards more active engagements with the voices and networks left out of dominant regional narratives. My own research builds on this by employing more active engagements with alternative voices and spaces in Bosnia, and local knowledge production, as employed in subaltern and feminist geopolitics. Combining these approaches has implications for both studies of Balkanism and subaltern research. The two fields share many similarities but yield different results. Considering the shared history of Othering, marginalisation and complex web of narratives framing the Balkans and regions associated with Subaltern Studies, the two have much to learn from each other. For example, methodologically, Balkan studies can gain much from the more active engagements with identity and knowledge production employed by subaltern scholars; and the

different ways that these manifest themselves, as demonstrated in my research, may have implications for subaltern studies and postcolonial theory more broadly.

### *Thick description*

I will now explore the concept of *thick description*, which relates to some of the issues raised in subaltern approaches; before examining some examples of geographical literature that do not engage with subaltern theory directly, but attempt to employ alternative frames of analysis in research.

In her article on *Postcolonialising Geography*, Robinson (2003) states that we need to ‘acknowledge locatedness’, go back to regional studies - learning from places and the people in them - and reassess Western conceptions of scholarly to include non-Western studies in mainstream academia. More recently, Jazeel (2017) and Chari (2016) have acknowledged both the divide between geography and Area Studies, and the benefits of bridging this gap. Schisms occur in both the colonial heritage of Area Studies and geography’s desire to distance itself from this (Chari, 2016), and the ‘slow work’ involved in research of this kind (para Jazeel, 2017, p. 97). Both Chari (2016) and Jazeel (2017) believe there is relevance in updating and ‘decolonising’ Area Studies approaches in geography in order to ‘impel scholars to think with the resources of other parts of the world, not just about their cultural differences, but rather to understand their general propositions about the world’ (Chari, 2016, pp. 791–792). This allows us to recognise both interconnectedness and difference, attending to some of the concerns of both subaltern and Balkan scholars on how to navigate the line between exoticising and homogenising cultures. I engage with local scholarship in my research but more importantly, with the forms of knowledge that are shaped and circulated through artistic networks. In this way I am expanding the locations from which knowledge of Bosnia is circulated. I engage with the ways that local actors are navigating this divide between interconnectedness and difference, and the implications this has for broader regional studies.

Tuathail (1996) does try to include what, to Western academics, would be deemed non-scholarly knowledge in his article on the *anti-geopolitical eye*. In it he discusses journalist Maggie O’Kane’s attempts to use emotional reporting ‘to establish moral proximity and embed the place [Bosnia] and its people within our own everyday

experience' (Tuathail, 1996, p. 176). I agree that it is a useful critical tool and one that could be beneficial in exploring anti-geopolitical political art. However, the way in which he develops this concept is in some respects problematic. The article focuses too much on the role of impassioned journalism that I argue can be very unhelpful, as it perpetuates stereotypes raised not only in the Balkanist discourse outlined by Todorova (2009), but also a very specific polarised account of events that were highly complex. By this I mean that the nuances present in local knowledge of events were somewhat removed in the international press. Whilst polarised opinions of course exist in Bosnia, there is to some extent knowledge amongst citizens that normal people were caught up in the events of the war regardless of ethnicity. Additionally, this is still Western knowledge production because O'Kane is a British journalist. In my own research, I contrast Western and local approaches to knowledge production and representation in the region, in order to explore what is left out of dominant narratives.

Tuathail's (1996) article does, however, reveal an important point about the role of emotions in research and the rejection of the Cartesian self. The notion that the self and the world are separate entities is undoubtedly unhelpful and his elaboration of how O'Kane's use of emotion in journalism was able to connect the international audience to events in Bosnia is useful. But a rejection of the divide between self and the world/knowledge must not come at the expense of balance. The narrative must be reframed or elaborated, which Toal (2003) does to some extent bring forth in a later study on geopolitical knowledge in the post-9/11 context. Here, like Robinson's (2003) call for a return to regionalism, he argues the need for what he terms 'thick' regional knowledge compared to the 'thin' knowledge that drives geopolitical conflicts and strategies (Toal, 2003, p. 655). His argument is that the shift away from what has come to be seen as 'banal regional description and a lack of commitment to systematic social theory and explanation' (Toal, 2003, p. 654) has led to a reliance on thin knowledge of data and global structures. This has meant hasty and simplistic engagements with geopolitical processes. In order to strengthen research and responses to geopolitical processes, it is necessary to attend to both thin and thick knowledge.

Someone else who has shaped ideas of thick description is the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (2000). He describes thin description as the basic explanation of events, thick description as the explanation of all possible elements behind the events, and the task of ethnography as lying between the two: to create ‘a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures’ (Geertz, 2000, p. 7). However, Geertz (2000, p. 20) is wary of the cultural limitations for ethnographers:

cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, not discovering the continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.

Both Geertz’s (2000) and Toal’s (2003) approach to thick knowledge or description inform my research. I aim to contribute to ‘thick’ regional knowledge of Bosnia through an exploration of the alternative frameworks of analysis created through artistic practices and engagements with space. However, I am aware of my own limitations and role in creating ‘a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures.’

#### *Alternative frames of analysis*

Scholars exploring popular geopolitics, which examines geopolitical processes through the lens of popular culture, have also tried to recalibrate the level at which we analyse geopolitics. Popular culture is entangled with society and analyses of it demonstrate geopolitical shifts throughout history. As Dittmer (2010) identifies, objections to popular culture – in film, television, cartoons – are indicative of broader attitudes to certain groups within society that for various reasons are viewed as deviating dangerously from the norm. Whether it be through comic books (Dittmer, 2005, 2007, 2013), movies (Dodds, 2003, 2008) or patterns of popularity of broader popular culture tropes (Saunders, 2012), scholars working in this field demonstrate the different ways in which culture shifts and circulates geopolitical narratives outside of elite groups.

Research in popular geopolitics has expanded to include audience/fan studies (Dittmer and Dodds, 2008) and the role of affect (Dittmer and Gray, 2010). This allows for the study of not only how geopolitics is circulated through popular culture but also the agency, embodiment and networks that build amongst audiences. Whilst



I accept the benefits of audience studies in the sense of widening research on culture to include greater agency and broader networks, I do not view it as essential to my own research. Art does not function in the same way as popular culture and the ways in which its audiences are formed and communicate are not as structured. Responses to art are often more reserved and as geographers Foster and Lorimer (2007, p. 429) note, '(s)ometimes people find art hard to criticize ... Visual expression engages senses which are not disciplined, are complex, and are not necessarily pleasant.' Audience reactions to art are therefore somewhat unhelpful and difficult to gauge. However, the relationship between art and audience in Bosnia and the ways that this has evolved over time does feature in my analysis, as they are indicative of art's place in pre and postwar society, and the ways this relationship reflects broader socio-political patterns.

I will now explore the ways in which emerging research on art and geopolitics builds on the ideas of popular geopolitics, and the extent to which this focus is relevant to the aims of my research of alternative geographies, politics and identities in contemporary Bosnia. Art has been explored in cultural geography (Butler, 2006; Hawkins, 2011, 2013a, 2013b) and as a methodological practice in geography more broadly (Foster and Lorimer, 2007), but its inclusion in the study of political geography is relatively recent. Where I think these studies in political geography are helpful is the sense in which artistic practices both engage with and create spaces in which the nature of geopolitical narratives are encountered, disrupted and questioned. Ingram (2011, para p. 218) identifies key intersections between the concerns of contemporary geopolitics studies and art practices, including performativity, embodiment, technology and displacement. The emerging literature on art in this field demonstrates how exploring these processes can show 'what is screened out' of mainstream geopolitical examinations (Amoore, 2009, p. 28). Highlighting the primacy of the visual in contemporary society, Amoore (2009, p. 18) states that 'how we see, who we see, to what we give our attention to, takes on a new significance.' Attention is key here because artistic practices in relation to geopolitics should not be considered calls to action, but rather as instigators of a process of continued questioning of dominant geopolitical structures (Amoore and Hall, 2010; Williams, 2014).

I will examine the processes outlined by scholars exploring the relationships between art and geopolitics further in the second part of my literature review on the uses of art and art practices. However at this point, I would like to discuss an area that I aim to contribute to: the lack of representation of non-Western geopolitical narratives. Whilst the West is linked to the processes I explore in contemporary Bosnia, I am exploring a lingering and disinterested entanglement as opposed to say Ingram's (2012a, 2012b) explorations of artistic responses to war and peace in Iraq. Similarly Amoores (2009) study explores post 9/11 security politics and her article with Hall (Amoores and Hall, 2010) deals with both this and border politics in the US more broadly. Examinations of art's relation to geopolitics therefore raise different questions to those of a non-Western context such as Bosnia. One area that I do think is particularly relevant to the Bosnian context however is that of the alternative networks and politics of peace outlined in Ingram's 2012 article on Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension* project. This project involved the Iraqi artist placing himself in a US gallery space with a paintball gun wired to a live forum through which the virtual audience could both communicate with and shoot at him. The surprising element was that people not only became overly aggressive towards him, but also demonstrated solidarity that extended to physically visiting him to offer assistance/support. Ingram (2012b) notes how by placing himself in a physically threatened position and promoting real time engagement with a global audience, Wafaa Bilal not only performed spaces of tension and aggression but also peace and support. This is important because it highlights the alternative networks that build around artistic practices, something that is central to my research on contemporary Bosnia. Whilst not concerned with the term *peace* directly, I am interested in exploring the geographies of tolerance or normalcy through art practices.

## **Conclusion**

By engaging with literature on the construction of identities, spatial fragmentation and the interrelated nature of these processes, I have demonstrated how by introducing the idea of reconciliation and engagement with the past, academics have alluded to alternative public opinions and moderate stances on regional politics, but have struggled to move beyond this rather superficial level of engagement. Contextual shifts and developments have led to the 'geo-politicization of greater aspects of everyday social life' (Ó Tuathail, 1996, pp. 73–74), which is why

examining alternative spaces is so important but relatively under studied in this context. Space has become ‘a central theme in contemporary art practice and theory’ more broadly (Ingram, 2013, p. 462), so it is important to think about how these practices can both engage with and embody (geo)politics. It must be acknowledged that the projects and groups I engage with in Bosnia are not representative of the region as a whole. They do however represent strong alternative ways of thinking through the conditions and spaces of post-Dayton Bosnia. Building on the practices of feminist, subaltern and popular geopolitics, as well as engaging with the emerging literature on art and geopolitics, my research explores the ways in which artists engage with and rework space in post-Dayton Bosnia, and the broader political implications this might have.

## **Chapter Three: Exploring the uses of art and art practices**

### **Introduction**

The way in which I have chosen to reconceptualise and analyse fragmentation in Bosnia is through an engagement with artists and art practices in the region. Drawing on debates on politics and aesthetics, I explore the pitfalls of overtly political art and the extent to which art and politics can be viewed as already interrelated phenomena. Building on this latter point, with reference to recent work on art and politics in Bosnia, I explore the different relationships between artistic practices and issues of particular relevance to the region, such as the function and fetishisation of trauma in art, which includes interrelated themes of memory, humour and exploitation. For all of these questions it is important to consider who or what artists are engaging with, how and why; and what the different ways of being political within art are. However the starting point of my research is to explore the geographies of art practices.

### **Socially engaged and participatory art practices**

First I engage with key dilemmas on socially engaged and participatory art practices, drawing particularly on art theory from Grant Kester (2004) to illustrate some of the proposed benefits of these practices. I then link this with the regional context of Bosnia and broader truth and reconciliation goals, in order to outline some of the problems with these approaches in art practices.

Moving beyond studies of the psychological benefits of creative responses to trauma (Woodward, 2012), I explore arguments within the field of political theory on the societal benefits of socially engaged and participatory art practices, specifically in traumatic or politically controversial contexts. Some politics scholars working in this field (Cohen-Cruz, 2002; Mouffe, 2008) argue that art based around community and participation has strong potential to offer different modes of analysis due to it being ‘as much about the process of involving people in the making of the work as the finished object itself’ (Cohen-Cruz, 2002). In projects with a specific community focus, gaps or problems in society that are being ignored can be addressed in creative, performative ways. By this I mean that issues can be addressed through projects that involve communities or targeted audiences to perform dialogues or identities outside of normal frameworks. This is not a performance in the sense of it being staged but

relates to ideas of performativity and performance within the art world, whereby the embodiment of identities and dialogues that take place within the framework of an art project may differ from or challenge the performed identities of everyday life.

This relates to notions in art theory that art can provide safe spaces or alternative contexts for dialogue concerning controversial issues (Kester, 2004). Art theorist Grant Kester (2004) explores the question of dialogue further by examining participatory art defined specifically around the creation of dialogue in various European and North American contexts. For example, a 1994 project of the Austrian group Wochen Klauser based around prostitution, drug policies and homelessness in Zurich, and Suzanne Lacy's *The Roof is on Fire* project in Oakland, California from around the same period. The latter project is particularly relevant to explore in the context of my research, since it dealt with deconstructing identity narratives of black and minority ethnic (BME) youths in Oakland. Staged in a car park in Oakland, the project gathered BME teenagers to discuss issues of racism, stereotyping and so on, in some cases with members of the Oakland police force and others connected with racial profiling. Kester and the artist viewed the project's status as art rather than outreach as the reason for its perceived success in creating a safe space for teenagers to talk about controversial or traumatic subjects. But to what extent does this differ from outreach work? What makes it art? Kester (2004) draws on work from the philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1990), and the history and theory of European Avant-Garde movements, to link his focus on what he terms 'dialogical' art practices with earlier shifts away from objects towards aesthetic experience more broadly. However, I do not think that his justification of this is strong enough. Aesthetic experience and all of the elements that constitute it are important to art analysis but the projects that Kester focuses on have a very forced political narrative, which blurs the boundaries between art and social engagement too far.

To consider the audience-participants themselves, I would argue that it is important to assess the degree of exploitation involved in projects such as this. On the one hand, *The Roof is on Fire* can be seen to have functioned in the sense of allowing the marginalised to speak, but through whom, how and to what end? This project took place in the 1990s and racial profiling and stereotyping is still a significant problem in the USA today. So for the artist and Kester to assign some degree of success to the

project based on the ability to bring people together to talk in a safe space is problematic because what was the success and whom did it benefit? A central argument in my research is that art should not be forced to have a function, however if it is given an overt function it is necessary to consider to what extent it is engaging in a positive way with society, rather than acting in exploitative ways by making serious societal issues into art projects.

Explorations of public art such as these therefore to some extent make a direct link between art and politics. As Bishop (2012) argues, there is a danger that in according art such an overt political role, one in which it in some way serves a purpose traditionally held by government, we alter the nature of both art and politics, and shift responsibility for change away from governments and political actors. In the context of Bosnia especially, these controversies are worth exploring due to the combination of both extreme political distrust and social apathy. International relations scholars (Dragović-Soso, 2010, p. 29) have noted a ‘proliferation of various internationally backed projects and mechanisms to help societies emerging from conflict and authoritarian rule deal with their difficult pasts.’ Although this is discussed in the context of truth commissions and educational reforms, the same could be said about art projects. There are many issues with truth and reconciliation projects but one of the most relevant to the concerns of my research is the procedural and forced approach to trauma.

The Monument Group’s *Four Faces of Omarska* (2012-13), for example, attempted an interdisciplinary approach to the documenting and memorialising of Omarska. The team was made up of researchers from Goldsmiths University of London, Serbian artist Milica Tomić, and a few survivors and family members of victims of the camp. The *Four Faces* was an interactive, multimedia archive documenting the various phases (or faces) of Omarska. Omarska was one of the many hubs of industrial production in Bosnia during the Yugoslav period. However, during the war it was a detention camp for Bosnian Muslims, and now it is a key example of the post-socialist privatisation of industry and the devastation this has caused in Bosnia.

In its three-month operation as a detention camp, Omarska held 2.5-3000 detainees, 800 of whom died. There still remains much controversy over even simple questions,

such as how to classify the camp: detention, extermination, concentration, death, ethnic cleansing, ethnic purification (para Brenner, 2011, p. 355). The term ‘elitocide’ has even been used since detainees ‘were divided into groups, with ... *group A* running a particular risk because they belonged to Prijedor’s elite’, and were therefore mostly killed (Brenner, 2011, p. 356).

Memorialisation of the wartime legacy is an ongoing battle however, as socio-anthropologist Manuela Brenner (2011) states, it is not simply an issue of ethno-national politics. The multinational steel production company ArcelorMittal has owned the site since 2004, as well as all steel production in Bosnia and various neighbouring Balkan states. Both ArcelorMittal and international NGOs have played a part in the inability to effectively commemorate the past. Initially meetings with ArcelorMittal were positive (2004-5) and The Soul of Europe NGO was commissioned to help mediate. However they created a near impossible task for themselves, since the goal was to reach an agreement on all sides – workers, victims and local politicians (Brenner, 2011). The organisers were accused of ‘rush(ing) things to a quick solution’ and allowing war criminals more influence than the victims (para Brenner, 2011, p. 360).

The plans were never realised in part due to this, but also because victims were limited in speech and access in order not to alienate the local Serb population (Brenner, 2011). Access is currently denied without a permit and the company prefers to distance itself from the debate, choosing to invest in local community projects that are unconnected to wartime activities. In sum, the site is now entirely privatised with prohibited access for anything other than capitalist purposes.

ArcelorMittal is a company wracked by many international controversies, yet it was chosen to provide material for Anish Kapoor’s Olympic *Orbit* (2012), with steel coming specifically from Omarska, though not in any way symbolically chosen. As part of the *Four Faces* project, the Monument Group decided to claim this as a ‘memorial in exile’ (Foresnic Architecture Working Group, 2012). Additionally, they collected a vast amount of material to create a living testament to the site in all its phases.

All of the Monument Group's actions (recording, archiving and engaging) serve an important purpose, which is to document and preserve the history of Omarska. And of course, being an interdisciplinary group limits the ability to critique purely its artistic merits. However, we see a proliferation of art-research projects in Bosnia and post-conflict areas more broadly and it is unclear whose interests it serves. As artist Mladen Miljanović commented: 'you have artists who decided to go this way of the pathetic and to exploit the pathetic. You know? Social pathetic.'<sup>6</sup> In the case of Omarska this was felt especially by the local community not because they were opposed to commemorating the site (I spoke with artists and activists who work very hard to commemorate all victims of the war) but because it was felt to be a superficial engagement by people who mostly have no connection to the site or the area. With the main artistic representative being an established Belgrade artist, this element of the project was particularly under attack since it was felt that it was, as Miljanović describes more broadly, exploitation of this 'social pathetic' theme.

International funding for Bosnian art projects has also been somewhat religious and superficial in its focus on truth and reconciliation targets, which still defines who remembers and how. For example, the *(Re)Collecting Mostar* project of the Abart group received international funding from sources including the United Nations. This had a very direct approach to "divided" cities and artistic interventions in these spaces. The concept was to collect individual narratives and maps of Mostar, which did not have to be factually accurate, in order to question how the place is mapped politically (Abart, 2011; Hampton, 2011). This was an excellent project but it does blur the lines between art and research project, which I will discuss further in my analysis chapters. Additionally, the Abart group themselves noted that the funding brought with it unwanted pressures to have quotas and frame their project in ways that fit a reconciliation narrative.<sup>7</sup>

So with overt attempts to be engaged or involve local communities, there can be a double-issue at play: on the one hand, the minimising of both art and serious societal issues by trying to forcefully combine the two, but also the extent to which such

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mladen Miljanović: artist, professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy and Bosnian Pavilion representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale (09/07/2014)

<sup>7</sup> Research notes on meeting with Mela Žuljević: project coordinator and designer of the Abart collective, Mostar 2008-2012 (25/05/2014)



projects are able to overcome the problems of more traditional responses to reconciliation. This connects with Jill Bennett's (2012) research, which draws on the idea of aesthetics offering us 'new ways of being in the event' (p. 43) and examining the contemporaneity of trauma. What I take from my reading of Bennett is that the long-running debate on art and its relationship to political activism has had a reductive attitude towards representation. The power of the connection between art and politics or historical events is not a straightforward issue of representation, and neither are the terms under which we remember.

A specific example of this in Bosnia is Carabelli's (2013) sociological discussion of the Abrašević Youth Centre in Mostar. She notes that 'the politics of the centre (and thus the youth activists that use the space) critically engage with *nostalgia* as a *reflective tool*' (Carabelli, 2013, p. 56). Referencing Boym's models of *reparative* and *reflective* nostalgia, she recognises the latter as being about the individual and the idea of the past, therefore something that is used as a tool and present amongst Mostar youth as 'a way to articulate the desire for a different future through the discourse of ... (the) past' (Carabelli, 2013, p. 58). Using nostalgia as a tool is a useful way to frame the work and politics of many contemporary art groups in Bosnia. Any Yugonostalgia that one encounters is not so easily framed in the traditional sense of longing for the past, but instead acts as a way of renegotiating elements of this past and creating an identity within it. My research further explores the practical application of Yugonostalgia by artists and cultural workers in Bosnia.

Although I do not discuss memorialisation per se in my research, politics scholar Jenny Edkins (2003, p. 59) notes that 'effective memorials express the impossibility of closure and the inevitable contradictions of any society.' This can be a useful framework to use when exploring art in political/post-conflict situations. As scholars in the field of geography concur, 'artistic interventions are not political because they resolve a political issue, pointing to its causes and calling for a solution, but exactly because they point to irresolvability and difficulty' (Amoore and Hall, 2010, p. 299). In Bosnia, some artists view it as their duty to engage overtly with politics and for Western audiences and those writing about art in the region, this appears to be the most popular form. For example, Cynthia Simmons' (2010, p. 3) article on gender and socially engaged art notes the example of Alma Suljević who after the war 'reject(ed)

pure aestheticism because she believed in giving it a function.’ Since 1998, Suljević has dedicated her artistic practice to the issue of landmines in Bosnia. Her 1998 project *4 Entity* maps landmines and draws up a new territory from these maps. As Jovanovic (2006) notes, this is also a play on the controversial entity system in Bosnia because Suljević is commenting on the arbitrary nature of borders by drawing her own. For her 1999 work *Annuling the Truth*, she went directly into landmine sites in order to take soil to sew into bags, which she sold to fund the clearance of landmine sites (Bryzgel, 2013; Simmons, 2010). Whilst admirable, it is important to consider what is lost, gained and/or restricted in these approaches. There is danger in giving function in art primacy based purely on geopolitical contexts.

Despite these being old works, they are still Suljević’s most famous and were displayed in a retrospective of contemporary Bosnian art in Paris in July 2014. I think this is a good illustration of how behind the times international perceptions of Bosnia are and the need to move things forward. In fact, ninety percent of the exhibition was focused on war or ethnicity-related themes. I expressed my frustration to the two friends I visited the exhibition with, neither of whom are connected with Bosnia or the former Yugoslavia more broadly. Part of the conversation went as follows:

Me: Well this is not what I expected at all

Friends: Really? This is pretty much exactly what I expected a Bosnian art exhibition to be like.<sup>8</sup>

In this exchange we see that even people with very little knowledge or reason to think of Bosnia or the former Yugoslavia have a specific framework of what to expect to hear/see in relation to this geographic area. I had expected more from the exhibition because the curator, Pierre Courtin, has worked in Sarajevo for eleven years and does a lot of excellent work to champion the local artistic community there. I thought that he might try to show a different side of Bosnia for this international exhibition but instead he went for a very generic and internationally appealing/recognisable theme. It was an opportunity to shake this common framework, rather than feed into it and is a

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<sup>8</sup> Extract from field notes of conversation with UK friends at the Memory Lane exhibition, Agnes B Gallery, Paris (19/07/2014)

key indicator of the dilemmas facing artists and cultural workers in marketing Bosnian art internationally. This was the first exhibition of its kind in twenty years and therefore a carefully curated theme had to be considered. That theme ended up being memory and memories of what? War. Because this is what sells to investors.

### **Politics, aesthetics and art**

Now that I have introduced some of the critiques of socially engaged and participatory art practices, it is necessary to bring in wider debates on the relationships between politics, aesthetics and art within art theory and philosophy. I first engage with Claire Bishop's (2012) arguments on participatory art, before expanding on philosopher Jacques Rancière's (2010; 2013) critique of overtly political art practices.

Bishop outlines three drives in participatory art practices: 1) 'the desire to create an active subject' 2) 'the gesture of ceding authorial control ... conventionally regarded as more egalitarian and democratic' and 3) 'a perceived crisis in community and collective responsibility' (Bishop, 2006, p. 12). Point one is linked to the Marxist theorist and co-founder of the Situationist International Guy Debord's denial of the audience as a position. As Bishop (2006, p. 12) notes, Debord was against 'spectacle [which for him] denotes a mode of passivity and subjugation that arrests thought and prevents determination of one's reality.' However, referencing Rancière, Bishop (2006, p. 16) notes that 'the opposition of "active" and "passive" ... always ends up dividing a population into those with capacity on one side and those with incapacity on the other.' It is therefore necessary to open up an active interpretation of spectatorship, one in which it is acknowledged that 'every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it' (Eco, 2006, p. 22). An acknowledgement of autonomy for the artist, the artwork *and* the audience is arguably more participatory and engaged than art that is overtly designed to be so because it leaves space for thought, reflection and discussion, rather than simply offering a ready-made opinion.

If we look at early avant-gardists and their call for practical art, 'they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant ... The demand ... directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content' (Bürger, 2006, p. 48). This

notion of 'effect' is important because it starts examining how art interacts with space and processes (elements of the work itself) rather than how art can be made to act in participatory/socially engaged ways. Rancière discusses the significance of the removal of objects (or art) from their frameworks of meaning, through which a possibility to get at something that overtly political art misses is revealed. In discussion with Rancière, Arnall et al (2012, p. 291) elaborate on the concept of art's power lying in the 'wider distribution of forms of experience'. Rancière, (2013, p. 8) argues that when the ordinary is made beautiful through abstraction/decontextualisation, it reveals 'a trace of the true'. He therefore indicates that the most important focus in art should be on materials, objects, spaces and territory, rather than direct issues because this avoids focus on a single truth or narrative.

The above question of focus proposed by Rancière relates to, although cannot be equated with, the philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin's (2009) idea of revealing rather than destroying the secret mechanisms of power, 'provoking a continued curiosity' rather than an enclosed critique (Amoore and Hall, 2010). Framed another way, it could be seen as a call for the absorption of artistic methods of thinking into society, rather than a direct critique of society through art (para Bürger, 2006, p. 49). To represent or promote a viewpoint in art is pointless as a tool, but to invoke an experience of an event in some way is essential, 'multiply(ing) connections precisely by implicating the sensing, affective bodies of viewers in the connecting process' (Bennett, 2012, p. 155). This again builds on the idea of art's power lying in its ability to extend and incorporate events into a continuous process of questioning (para Bennett, 2012, p. 153). In the context of Bosnia, if 'certain understandings of the Bosnian state are made credible and normal, while others are cast out as criminal or abnormal' (Jeffrey, 2013, p. 11), it is important to explore this process of questioning and the extent to which it can help to expand spaces of difference. If, as Jeffrey (2013) claims, state power and identity are performative acts, then art's interruption of that performativity is a useful field to explore.

To explore further the concept that art and politics exist as interrelated phenomena (Rancière, 2010; Rancière and Rockhill, 2013; Steyerl, 2014), artist Hito Steyerl (2014, p. 5) states that:

Art is not outside politics but politics resides within its production, its distribution, and its reception. If we take this on, we might surpass the plane of a politics of representation and embark on a politics that is there, in front of our eyes ready to embrace.

The two are often viewed as separate things but to assume this rather than an intertwined relationship reduces artworks to the sphere of representation. Rancière (2010) establishes the idea that overtly critical art is doomed to failure due to the oversaturation of image and parody in contemporary society. People are very much aware of the ways in which society functions so ‘the mechanism (of critical art) ends up spinning around itself and playing on the very undecidability of its effect. In the end the *dispositif* feeds off the very equivalence between parody *as* critique and the parody *of* critique’ (Rancière, 2010, p. 134). He argues that ‘there exists a politics of aesthetics that predates artistic intentions and strategies’ (Rancière, 2010, p. 134), so they are already a part of each other. These assumptions also ignore the politics inherent in the structure of art and the art world(s). If ‘there is no ‘real world’ that functions as the outside of art (but) instead ... a multiplicity of folds in the sensory fabric of the common, folds in which outside and inside take on a multiplicity of shifting forms’ (Rancière, 2010, p. 148), then these ‘folds’ can be analysed more as part of a system, than as directly mirroring each other.

A specific illustration of this can be found in the special *Balkart* edition of the Kosovo 2.0 publication, which focused on art in the former Yugoslavia (2013). As noted by editor Besa Luci (2013, p. 4), both globally and in the former Yugoslav region, ‘mainstream media and politics treats art as a private activity, as if it is outside of our political sphere and social environment.’ Luci (2013, p. 4) also states that ‘in our region, a bidding logic in financing the art system ... is subject to nationalist aesthetic politics’ that can be viewed as an extension of the living conditions during the war, which separated people and art scenes equally (Vujkovic, 2008). Artists in Bosnia look to a variety of sources to avoid such ‘nationalist aesthetic politics’. There is now a sense of reaching out both regionally and internationally, for example Abrašević Youth Centre ‘is the only cultural centre (in Mostar) that vocally refuses to be identified along ethno-national lines’ (Carabelli, 2013, p. 55) and is mainly financed by

international donors, operating within a space that is interested but distanced from politics. But this internationalism does not remove art from politics, it simply removes it from *a* politics and inserts it into another.

Artists worldwide can seem hypocritical in their critique of these structures, yet willingness to cooperate in some way with the system. But as ‘there is no automatically available road to resistance and organisation for artistic labour ... (and) opportunism and competition are not a deviation of this form of labour but its inherent structure’ (Steyerl, 2014, pp. 3–4), it therefore becomes a question of what impact art has as part of, rather than a comment on, these structures. As Steyerl (2014, p. 5) comments, ‘we could try to understand its space as a political one instead of trying to represent a politics that is always happening elsewhere.’ To push this further, if art is inherently part of the politics it critiques or parodies, it ‘must become more modest ... (not profess) to be able to reveal the hidden contradictions of our world’ (Rancière, 2010, p. 145). These approaches to art allow it more agency because they assume that ‘art affects this reality precisely because it is entangled into all of its aspects’ (Steyerl 2014, 5), not simply because it makes a statement about reality.

The first two parts of this chapter have outlined the broader debates on politics, art and aesthetics that my research engages with. In the following sections I will go on to explore some contextually specific issues: those of geographical context and art, and the role of humour and antipolitics, which are key features of art practices in Bosnia.

### **Geographical context and art**

The concept of ‘imagining the Balkans’ (Todorova, 2009) and the concept of art *as* politics are bridged when examining the relationships between geopolitical/historical context and art. As Bosnian artist Maja Bajević (2014, p. 20) notes, ‘artists who are not from ... Occidental Europe and the States, are in many ways still treated as representatives of their place of birth.’ The limitations and poor choices that the international community and national governments place on artists in the former Yugoslavia are highlighted in *Balkart* (2013). The opening page states that ‘we (the contributors) intentionally employ Balkart as a concept in need of confrontation’ (Luci, 2013a, p. 5), acknowledging the strength of a unified field structurally and the similarities of the conditions of Balkan artists, whilst at the same time recognising that

as with all scenes, conceptually and ideologically it is not a unified field. This complexity is mirrored in broader questions surrounding a ‘destigmatized geography of art’ (Kaufmann, 2004), a concept that art historian Thomas Kaufmann uses to explore the extent to which art can be divorced from its geographical context without denying the differences that contribute to its production.

Geographical elements have been picked up elsewhere in art theory, for example Miwon Kwon (2000, p. 33) examines the celebration of a nomadic art culture in which ‘the idea of the fluidity of meaning has ... (been) conflated/confused with the idea of the fluidity of identities and subjectivities.’ However, Kwon (2000) is not arguing that it is impossible to divorce identity and place from art, rather that we have to attend to both longings and excitements of displacement and placement, something along the lines of acknowledging discomfort. In art terms ‘the avant-garde struggle has in part been a kind of spatial politics, to pressure the definition and legitimation of art by locating it elsewhere, in places other than where it “belongs”’ (Kwon, 2000, pp. 42–43). Here Kwon is talking about the pressure to create site-specific works in order to facilitate ‘the radical restructuring of the subject from an old Cartesian model to a phenomenological one of lived bodily experience’ (Kwon, 1997, p. 86). But I believe it can be relevant to a broader discussion of the geography of art.

Kaufmann (2004, p. 12) argues that ‘the geography of art, like cultural geography more broadly, does not only involve a general theory’ of place. There is a tendency to talk of place as a way to describe the art that is produced there, which ‘may appear to be just a simple form of categorization ... yet ... this procedure actually relies upon certain assumptions about identity’ (Kaufmann, 2004, p. 107). He argues that it is important to consider that wider exchanges in art, such as dialogues across borders and the migratory patterns of artists, even in early history, have contributed more to different styles and themes than a specific location. Kaufmann (2004) in fact describes the geographies of art as historically racialised in the same way as categorisations and cultures were linked to landscape and climate. For him, ‘a “destigmatized” geography of art requires better concepts than those of national or ethnic constants or their surrogate, identity’ (Kaufmann, 2004, p. 153). Whilst my research is based in one geographical location, I attend to the fact that artists are tied into global processes, and how that can be both enabling and problematic.

In the former Yugoslavia, the extent to which an artistic identity can be tied to place is further complicated by the outwardly extreme shifts in borders, languages and identities. Based on this complexity, I aim to explore the extent to which it is possible to trace a degree of continuity in the experimental and collective practices employed by regional artists and in what ways this might contradict the notion of a destroyed Yugoslavia, or rather the destroyed networks that existed during the Yugoslav period. West-centric studies tend to critique art as having some sort of reactionary and ephemeral relationship to society and politics. I explore the significance of regional continuity in relation to the idea of alternative political spaces/opinions by drawing on Yugoslav art history, primarily Djurić and Šuvaković's seminal book *Impossible Histories* (2003), Irwin's *East Art Map* (Irwin, 2006), and work by the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova in Ljubljana (Zdenka Badovinac, 1999; Badovinac et al., 2012). These all incorporate edited selections of writings on Yugoslav art by some of the top art historians and philosophers in the former Yugoslavia and include manifestos from significant art groups during this period. Tracing regional movements from the 1920s to the 1990s from a variety of perspectives, I explore these movements and link them with my findings in the contemporary scene to try to expand on what I currently view as a strong connection with Yugoslav practices and politics, even if not actively identified as such. This connection suggests identification amongst a number of young Bosnian citizens with the old 'brotherhood and unity' model, and the lack of a significant shift to more ethno-nationalist models of identification. It further supports the idea/model that art practices in the region flow more within broader Yugoslav borders than individual post-Yugoslav ones.

Speaking on literature, philosopher and linguist Roland Barthes notes that the idea of the author as an individual emerged as a relatively recent phenomenon, which is problematic if we consider that 'the *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end ... the voice of a single person, the *author*' (Barthes, 2006, p. 42). This could be particularly useful in examining art in Bosnia because it speaks to the issue of the context that is read into a work of art. In the case of my research, the context that is read into the work of art is that of the author/artist as a citizen of Bosnia. One contextual element that has featured heavily in examinations of Bosnia is that of trauma. The function and



fetishisation of trauma in art is important to explore, especially in post-conflict contexts. Edkins (2003) describes trauma in one sense as what happens between what we think is safe but proves to be otherwise (para p. 4). She describes 'the modern state ... (as) a contradictory institution: a promise of safety, security, and meaning alongside a reality of abuse, control and coercion' (Edkins, 2003, p. 6), which is certainly relevant to the former Yugoslavia. Politics and international relations studies have noted that attempts to form coherent states and borders in the region overruled any consideration of citizen safety or wellbeing, whilst at the same time playing on these fears and portraying them as originating from outside (Hudson, 2003; Woodward, 1995). How art navigates trauma is extremely important because there is a line of argument that it exploits trauma because this is the form of art that gets the most recognition (Salecl, 2010). As Steyerl (2014) argues, this popularity/exploitation can also be seen in the cash-in and expansion of galleries and exhibitions to countries with human rights and/or conflict issues.

Situating an analysis of Bosnian literature and the blues hero in his field of political science, Michael Shapiro discusses the idea that rather than straightforwardly addressing a narrative of the past, contemporary art (in his case literature) contributes to the evolving memory and images of wars: 'the ways in which wars will have been' (Shapiro, 2012, p. 492). This is an interesting idea that fits with conceptions of time and memory as shifting and changeable - the future anterior (Žižek, 2008). For Shapiro (2012), art can act as an ordering of chaos that does not have to make sense. In the context of Bosnia and the traumatic events that make up its past, this is especially relevant. Because trauma is often viewed as unspeakable, we need to find ways to work around linear narratives, 'encircling the real' (Edkins, 2003, p. 13). I explore the ways in which art can offer the non-linear narratives that are required to order the artist's chaos. Perhaps it is through incremental abstractions that healing can be achieved. By this I mean that trauma and healing are very individual and abstract terms. The notion that one solution or event can serve to heal the regional trauma is ridiculous, but maybe extending individual opportunities to order events is a way to progress. Thinking about art in this way may help to challenge liberal approaches to trauma and lead to more creative ways of analysing its role in contemporary Bosnia.

A final question related to art's approach to trauma is Edkin's (2003) idea of the fear of what trauma victims have to say. By trying to reshape ideas of memory, history and truth, artists can challenge state-sanctioned concepts of who remembers, how they remember, and how and when they move on. For Bosnia this could also be viewed as internationally-sanctioned ideas too, due to the wealth of projects aiming to heal its trauma. I therefore think it is important to explore art and artists that either do not, or explicitly refuse to engage with such issues.

### **Humour and art**

Expanding on Rancière's critiques of political art, I want to raise a theme that has become important in my research: humour. Rancière (2010) places this in his list of poor parodies/ineffectual critiques, stating that it has become institutionalised and recognised to the extent that it no longer serves a purpose. I do not believe that the relationship between humour, art and politics is so straightforward, especially in the context of Bosnia. I explore this issue by engaging with literature on humour in geopolitics, art theory and philosophy. Engaging with humour in contemporary Bosnian art practice ties together some of the previous themes of discussion because it relates closely to questions surrounding art, politics and geographical context. It also leads on to my final area of discussion in the literature review: antipolitics, which has emerged as a dominant theme in the research.

In the field of geopolitics, humour has been discussed in relation to popular culture (Dodds and Kirby, 2013; Purcell et al., 2009) and literature (Kuus, 2008; Ridanpää, 2014b), and Dittmer (2013a) has recently expanded these studies to explore its relation to affect and assemblage in Model UN societies. As Ridanpää (2014a, p. 701) states, humour is a 'spatially embedded institution' that forms bonds between people based on location, politics, culture and so on. Therefore exploring the geography of humour may also help to expand knowledge of non-elite processes in political geography.

In the context of Bosnia, I find political geographer Merje Kuus' (2008) article on humour and the character of Švejk in the Czech novel *The Good Soldier Švejk* particularly interesting, as it has some similarities with strands of humour in the work I am researching. In her study of the relationships between the humour of Švejk and

everyday humour towards NATO membership in modern-day Central-East Europe, Kuus (2008, p. 260) identifies how even though ‘Central Europeans appear to be eagerly following Western rhetoric ... they do not internalise it ... [and often use it] to gain leverage.’ This is important when looking at the former Yugoslav region, where it is possible to witness similar forms of subtle humour and deviant obedience towards Western rhetoric. Kuus (2008, para p. 259) states that the humour of Švejk subverts traditional notions of domination and resistance. She outlines a subtle humour of over-identification in Švejk that undermines the political system it critiques by highlighting its stupidity, before drawing parallels with contemporary Estonian attitudes towards NATO membership. Over-identification in humour is a good example of agency and difference that avoids a one-dimensional account of resistance or obedience (para Kuus, 2008, p. 263), something that is needed in studies of contemporary Bosnia.

Art critic and writer Jennifer Higgie (2007, p. 12) picks up on the idea that ‘humour has not been considered a subject worthy of consideration’ despite the fact that some art critics do recognise that the use of parody or humour is not a straightforward critique, but a signifying tool (Heiser, 2007). Drawing on philosopher Henri Bergson’s (2007) concept that laughter can be seen as a living thing and can therefore shed light on aspects of life, I explore the social significance of humour in art, particularly examining its relationship to artists, place and audience. Speaking from the art world, critic David Hickey (2007) and curator Sheena Wagstaff (2007) both allude to some emancipatory possibility in humour through its potential to poke fun at the artist and not just the system, bringing art closer to the public. This in some way brings us closer to an acknowledgement of art as politics because it is a method of ‘[demonstrating] an acceptance by the artist that she is also a sign; so signaling the end of authentic selfhood’ (Wagstaff, 2007, p. 79). By exploring these concepts we can start to think about the nuances of how humour is utilised in art, rather than dismissing all humour in art as ineffectual.

Humour is a strong part of Bosnian (and broader ex-Yugoslav) society and this is reflected in regional art practices. Although not a study of art per se, historian Anna Sheftel (2011) explored the dark humour present in the memorial to the international community in Sarajevo. This memorial consisted of a giant tin of spam (a standard

UN aid supply during the war) on a platform dedicated to the international community. She argues that in this case and more broadly, humour should be seen as political action rather than a reflection of politics, and that this particular form of dark humour ‘allows Bosnians to express dissent from dominant narratives of the Bosnian war that they view as unproductive or disruptive’ (Sheftel, 2011, p. 1). So for many it is a way of identifying out of the ethnicization of everyday life brought on by democratic bureaucracy (para Sheftel, 2011, p. 6). Monuments like this and the Mostar Bruce Lee question the function or value of truth, but also act as ‘a sarcastic rejection of the postwar project of commemoration and public remembering that has been promoted and institutionalized by the [international community]’ (Sheftel, 2011, p. 11). Similarly, in the neighbouring former Yugoslav state of Serbia, international relations scholar Janjira Sombatpoonsiri (2015) explores the role of humour in non-violent struggle against the Milošević regime during the nineties. Like Sheftel’s (2011) argument in the Bosnian context, she notes the historical and central role of humour and the ways that it can disrupt ‘truth claim[s]’ (Sombatpoonsiri, 2015, p. 9) and point to alternative possible futures. Both see humour as a key method of identifying out of dominant narratives in wartime and postwar former Yugoslavia. This represents what I refer to as the antipolitical quality of humour, which I discuss further in the following section of my literature review; and has become a key term in my study of contemporary Bosnian art practices.

The presence of humour in Bosnian art is often more as a playful element than a straightforward joke or shock tactic. It is almost as though humour is absorbed into the works as one contextual element that cannot be moved beyond. Humour and laughter have always been part of the “Yugolsav” character (Sheftel, 2011; Vucetic, 2004; Žižek, 2002) so I would therefore like to pick up art critic Peter Shjeldah’s concept of laughter or humour in art as an element tied up with the experience of a place. In his analysis of the role of laughter in Ed Ruscha’s art and its relation to Los Angeles, Shjeldah states that ‘in Los Angeles, one laughs to survive, enjoys oneself not to enhance life but to live at all’ (Schjeldah, 2007, p. 73) and by capturing this in his art, Ruscha is the quintessential Los Angeles artist. Schjeldah (2007) argues that if you want to know Los Angeles, you can learn a lot more from Ruscha’s art than a guidebook or media representations. Bosnia is not Los Angeles but humour could be seen in the same way, even if I do not like this term ‘survive’. It implies a coping

mechanism that to some extent is true but the use of humour is not so simplistic. As Bergson (2007) notes when exploring the relationship between emotion, intelligence and laughter, you can have emotion in humour but if you cannot distance yourself, you cannot laugh.

Humour in art also relates to the idea of giving art a function, especially in terms of doing good in the world. It would therefore be interesting to explore further the critique of humour in art in conjunction with the critique of giving art a function. Perhaps the critique of the former assumes that it is trying to do the latter, which I do not think is always accurate. Hickey (2007, p. 120) believes that the art world and its relationship to the public is too distanced and exclusive, producing ‘an ongoing referendum on how things should look and the way we should look at them.’ This has broader critical implications for the position of art in society and the potential of humour to alter this. In terms of traumatic or politically contested/controversial contexts, humour can serve in the sense of interrupting the status quo to provoke a questioning rather than comment on things perceived as given. As the philosopher and activist Cornel West (cited in Horodner, 2007, p. 178) states, humour is not there ‘to persuade and convince (us) but to unsettle and unnerve ... (to) experience that wonderful vertigo and dizziness, and recognize even for a moment that (our) worldview rests on pudding.’ In the context of dark humour and trauma, it can act as ‘a vital tool ... in the processing of (events)’ (Morton, 2007, p. 213) but one that is often ignored or denied in contexts that are viewed as beyond humour, especially for a Western audience.

By exploring the use of humour in the context of Bosnian art practices, my research expands our conceptions of its function more broadly. Bosnia represents a unique space in which to examine the relationships between humour, art and politics, due to the continuity of humorous practices in the region and the dark events of its recent past. I explore the transferability and specificity of regional humour in order to highlight the inherently geographical nature of humour, and the ways in which it can contribute to the discipline more broadly.

## **Antipolitics and art**

The position of humour in contemporary Bosnian art practices is one I consider as *antipolitical*, which is a term that I employ throughout the research. At first glance, the concept of *antipolitics* may seem to act in a depoliticising sense. Indeed, since the publication of anthropologist James Ferguson's (1994) *The Antipolitics Machine*, scholars focusing on development have used the term to criticise 'development interventions [that] obscure the political and economic reasons that poverty exists' (Youdelis, 2016, p. 1376). In other words, these interventions are viewed as antipolitical in the sense of their lack of engagement with the important but complex issues that underpin the root of many of the problems they aim to address. However, the term antipolitics predates this use and it is this earlier definition that I wish to explore further in relation to my own work.

The form of antipolitics that connects with my own research emerged in the cultural worlds of Central and Eastern Europe during the seventies and eighties. As sociologist Farveen Parvez (2011, p. 288) highlights, this manifestation of antipolitics can be viewed as 'the rejection of state engagement in favor of the valorization of private life, as a substitute for democratic political participation.' One text that I engage with particularly in relation to this definition is art historian Klara Kemp-Welch's (2013) book *Antipolitics in Central European Art*. Although she explores the concept from a historical perspective in different geographical and political contexts, there are many parallels in the practices and identities employed in the works she examines that demonstrate why antipolitics is a useful way to conceptualise the politics of artistic practices in the context of my own research. Kemp-Welch's (2013) work attempts to break down the binary approach to art practices in communist Europe, where artists were either viewed as conforming to socialist patterns of production or as "rebelliously" following the West. Placing Central and Eastern European artists in this either/or system of categorisation denies their agency to identify outside of the two blocs, and fails to acknowledge what Kemp-Welch (2013) identifies as their own unique form of resistance. As both Kemp-Welch (2013) and political scientist Barbara J Falk (2003) note, antipolitical resistance is not depoliticised but instead recognises other politics, activating engaged and empowered citizens across a number of levels and sectors.

The artists and dissidents explored by Kemp-Welch (2013, p. 4) openly expressed distrust and distaste for the terms ‘politics’, ‘peace’ and ‘power’, and adopted antipolitics as an alternative political or ‘second culture’. Exploring the work and writings of Vaclav Havel, Kemp-Welch (2013) examines the concept of power within dissident circles, both artistic and amongst Soviet citizens more broadly, and the notion of it existing in acts of refusal in everyday life. Havel and others that she places in this antipolitical category rejected politics precisely because they wanted resistance to be subsumed into everyday rituals, rather than to get art caught up in overtly revolutionary projects. Kemp-Welch (2013) notes how artists within the antipolitical movements of the time employed humour as a strategy towards everyday resistance. For example, the Hungarian artist Endre Tót, whose work took a humorous approach, preferring to emphasise joy and openness over the conversely dark and closed regime; or Jiri Kovanda, a Czech artist of the same period, who recognised ‘the importance of focusing on oneself – and on ‘small matters’ – as a necessary precondition for arriving at wider societal changes’ (Kemp Welch, 2013, pp. 10-11).

Kovanda is particularly interesting in this context because he challenged conceptions of both art and politics. He was a construction worker by trade who explored all details of society outside of the top-level politics that dominated narratives of the region through collage, text and performance. In shifting to more performance elements in his work, he continually aimed to both remove art from traditional spaces but to also camouflage his role as an artist:

Although Kovanda carried out his actions in public, he did so without advertising them as artistic ... thus exploring the double absence of a conventional audience, both on the street and in the traditional space of the gallery (Kemp Welch, 2013, pp. 198-199)

This can be viewed as a way of commenting on the lack of culture in Czech society of the time, but also as a way questioning the role of culture and the artists, bringing it in line with the everyday. Tót’s work in Hungary also aimed to highlight an element of everyday culture in Central and Eastern Europe that was often overlooked in favour of dominant ideologies – that of humour and joy. It was felt that in the

context of resistance and shifting public perceptions, it was important that no individual was idolised. By poking fun at themselves and their work, or simply refusing to be acknowledged as artists, they were able to avoid becoming leaders of any singular revolutionary movement, in an attempt to subsume smaller everyday revolutions into the fabric of society.

Additionally, in Hungary, the novelist and essayist Gyorgy Konrád (1984) wrote a treatise on antipolitics, which is often cited as the first use of this term (Brannan, 2003; Falk, 2003; Isaac, 2003; Kemp-Welch, 2013; Parvez, 2011). In it, Konrád (1984, p. 35) critiques the ideological war of the time between the East and West that masked the everyday struggles of ordinary citizens: 'Ideological war speaks a language of sensationalism; on all sides it continually stuffs minds meant for better things full of lies and half truths.' He positions antipolitics as a more moderate politics focused on caring and support, in opposition to aggression, killing and all forms of superiority:

Antipolitics is the politics of those who don't want to be politicians and who refuse to share in power. Antipolitics is the emergence of independent forums that can be appealed to against power; it is a counter power that cannot take power and does not wish to. Power it has already, here and now, by reason of its moral and cultural weight...

Antipolitics neither supports nor opposes governments; it is something different. Its people are fine and right where they are; they form a network that keeps watch on political power...

[Antipolitics] means ineradicable suspicion toward the mass of political judgments that surround us. Often these judgements are simply aggression in another form (Konrád, 1984, pp. 230–232).

This manifesto highlights some essential points for my own research. In it, we see that antipolitics is not apathy but rather a process of identifying out of dominant narratives. Just as artists in Central and Eastern Europe during this period were trapped in the ideological war of the communist East and capitalist West, artists in



the former Yugoslavia today are trapped between a number of competing ideologies: ethno-nationalism, liberal peace, East, West, socialist, capitalist, localisation, internationalisation and so on. This has impacts on both art production in the region and society more broadly. For both Konrád (1984) and the artists explored in my own research, such frameworks and ideologies mask important needs in their respective societies. Antipolitics does not, therefore, deny the existence of overarching debates in controversial contexts but it refuses to be subsumed into them. My research explores these impacts further, as well as the innovative steps artists and cultural workers are taking to bypass counterproductive ideologies and assumptions.

The refusal to be subsumed into dominant narratives and debates connects with the final of Konrád's (1984) statements that I included in the above extract – that antipolitical stances are distrustful of politics, power and the motivations that lie behind them. This attitude of suspicion manifests in what Kemp-Welch (2013) outlines as a desire to extend the means of being political and to empower citizens to question the status quo, rather than to provide readymade answers or opinions for them; which in turn relates to some of the debates in art theory surrounding socially engaged or political art.

Since its origins in the cultural world of Central and Eastern Europe, antipolitics in the sense that I employ it has not been explored much outside of this context. In a 2011 article, sociologist Fareen Parvez uses the term to explore the politics of the Burqa in France. Here she contrasts the private politics of Muslim women and their identity in relation to the Burqa with the top-level politicisation of it, in order to highlight the alternative and frameworks of meaning that are often left out of the mainstream narratives on *laïcité*.<sup>9</sup> The way that she employs antipolitics in this research very much connects with the aims of feminist and subaltern geopolitics that frame my own research because she uses it to highlight the multiple levels of politics that are present in society and how, by exploring outside of more orthodox political actors and spaces, we encounter alternative narratives and attitudes towards something that is often presented in a very polarised way. This once again demonstrates the connection between antipolitics and my own research, and

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<sup>9</sup> *Laïcité* is the concept of France as a secular country that has been used in arguments and steps to outlaw overt religious symbols in public, which has disproportionately targeted and affected the Muslim community.

reinforces a conceptualisation of the term not as a denial of politics, but as a demonstration that politics happens in many different forms and at many different levels. In sum, I employ a definition of antipolitics that highlights empowerment and agency amongst ostensibly non-political subjects.

## **Conclusion**

This section engages with some of the key debates and themes in contemporary art practices that frame my research on the role of art in contested contexts. It has also demonstrated the bridge between geographical approaches to the study of Bosnia and the study of art practices. The benefits of a geographical approach to studying art can be seen in the expansion of ideas on the autonomy of art, and explorations of the spaces and systems in which it functions. Expanding on the idea of art offering ways to identify out of mainstream geopolitical narratives, I explore the strategies of humour and antipolitics in contemporary Bosnian art, and the flexible responses to truth, memory and trauma that it offers. In order to do this, it is necessary to shift the attention from being solely on outputs to incorporate the processes and spaces involved too (Paglen, 2008). This has methodological implications for my research, which I will explore in the following section.

## Chapter Four: Methodology

I will now outline my methodology, including the theoretical bases of my approach and the ways that I adapted this to fit the context of Bosnia and my research.

My overall method was ethnographic, with an emphasis on an ‘observant participant’ rather than ‘participant observation’ approach (para Hawkins, 2013, p. 199). A qualitative method such as ethnography suited the aims of my research because it ‘understands social life as the outcome of the interaction of structure and agency through the practice of everyday life’ and takes into account emotions and reflexivity (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 1), rather than a focus on data and discourse. It allows for flexibility and creativity in approaches, combining interviews with additional practices such as walking, photography, art and so on. And as Megoran (2006) states, it is a method that is somewhat lacking in political geography, which tends to favour discourse analysis. In his study of border geographies in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Megoran (2006, p. 622) demonstrates the ways in which ‘using ethnography ... (can) highlight discrepancies between elite and everyday political geography imaginations.’ This is because by employing extended ethnographic approaches, it is possible to experience the everyday, albeit from a different perspective to those who actually live it. The things that are learnt from lived experience, whilst of course to be taken reflexively, can be as useful in exploring geopolitical processes and issues as formal interviews, discourse analysis and so on.

My fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews with actors and external partners/collaborators, archival studies and studies of current projects, engagement with artists and the wider communities in which they work (mostly the Prijedor community), and intensive involvement in the planning and running of *Ars Kozara* 2014 and 2015. Interviews helped to gather more information on the work, motivations, aspirations, practicalities and importance of art movements in the region; and archival studies were used as comparisons to live projects, to demonstrate the evolution of artists’ work, and to allow for the study of past projects of particular significance to this research. I also spent an extended amount of time in Belgrade while researching and writing up. This allowed access to more extensive resources

and collections, specifically from the Yugoslav period, as well as experience of a comparative post-Yugoslav state and the links between countries.

Researching art cannot always be conducted in the same way as other ethnographic research, as timings have to be more flexible to go with the rhythms of artists. As Claire Bishop (2012) notes, critical art practices are responsive and reactive and therefore difficult to time research around. I therefore planned my research initially around two annual events (*Ars Kozara* and the Street Art Festival in Mostar) but preliminary research showed that *Ars Kozara* was more suited to my research and took place in the key period for Bosnian art events and projects anyway, which is May-September. By choosing events, or an event, I created a temporal anchor to base my research around, ensuring maximum exposure to artists and events. It also influenced my decision to split my research period over two years, rather than spending nine to twelve months solid in the region. Either approach could have worked however, there are long periods of inactivity in the region and by returning one year on, I had deeper connections with people and place plus material for comparison.

Even time away from the field was spent engaging with artists in Bosnia through social media; blog, website and media analysis; and personal communication. Time spent away from the field was therefore, as Hawkins (2013) notes, still *in the field* to a certain extent. Building on rapport with artists and maintaining a focus on the development of their work ‘is often considered key to studying these forms of art, and is identified as often lacking in more “traditional” art historical analysis’ (Hawkins, 2013, pp. 157-8). I was therefore able to take into consideration the wider factors surrounding artists’ work, rather than analysing them in a vacuum.

### **Art-Geography collaborations: exploring spaces and processes**

Art and politics have become increasingly significant topics of geographical interest and the approaches to art taken within geography have expanded beyond more traditional art historical approaches (Hawkins 2013). These new approaches vary in their degree of engagement but there are a few central tenets that researchers follow: wanting to explore the specificities of place and art’s relation to this; ‘challenging methodological limitations’ within and between disciplines (Last, 2012, p. 706);

playing a more active role within both the practices they study and the research they produce (Last, 2011); and highlighting the autonomy of experience.

The non-representational turn in geography saw the start of the expansion of approaches in geographical research to include art, creativity and so on. It also pushed for a greater focus on the relationships between things (both human and non-human) and on the processes and enactments of big questions, such as identity and politics. This calls for a methodological focus on what ‘we come to know through active experience rather than passive observation’ (Greenhough, 2010, p. 41) and an examination of the more non-discursive/interpretive elements involved in research and analysis. A focus on ongoing processes as opposed to “complete” and self-contained representations is mirrored in the field of contemporary experimental art practices (Kester, 2004), which have become more involved in the overall affective experience, than in the production of detached isolated objects. In my research it was essential to explore these experiences and processes, through analysis and documentation of not only the works and participation, but also the processes of production, reception and display. The inclusion of these additional sites of analysis allows for the exploration not only the obvious features of the works, but also their physical orderings and sensory effects (Hawkins, 2013). This is part of the reason why I expanded from a focus on art practices alone to include analysis of the work that local artists and cultural workers are doing to change the landscape of production, reception and display.

Geographical concerns have also entered into the field of art theory and practice. Researchers such as Irit Rogoff (2000), who focuses on visual cultures, build on the traditional analysis of works, which in the field of art history has largely been discursive and interpretive (Wylie, 2010), by situating this analysis within an embodied position. Through explorations of migrations and territories, Rogoff very much brings herself into the analysis and explores the personal embodied practices of artists through this lens. In recent geographical research on art and creative practices, there has been a push to go beyond this by incorporating active engagements with artists and art projects into research (Hawkins, 2013a). This is demonstrated in the emerging field of experimental geographies. Building to some extent on the questions raised in critical geopolitics about what and who defines political space, writers on

experimental geography and art practices push this one step further and examine and use contemporary media and art practices to ‘reframe the question of art in terms of spatial practice’ and shift attention from outputs to processes (Paglen, 2008, p. 31). Paglen (2008) argues that we have to engage with the processes of creating the spaces in which this expression and dialogue take place in order to assess their efficacy in achieving such aims.

This was very important in my research and highlights my approach as a geographer, rather than a traditional art historian. My focus throughout my fieldwork in Bosnia went beyond individual works to explore spaces that emerge around contemporary art practices. For example, my research on Republika Srpska in particular, since this is the region I spent the most time in, was very much grounded in exploring how art fit into and engaged with spaces in the various locations I studied: how did these spaces function differently from more conventional spaces and narratives of the region; who was included in these spaces and how was that approached; and how were these spaces received? In a project such as *Ars Kozara*, the individual works are almost the least important element behind 1) the creation of a permanently evolving open air gallery; 2) continued physical engagements with the controversial space of Kozara National Park; and 3) the annual event or happening, temporarily creating a space of difference, interaction, collectivity, collaboration and escape. So whilst a focus on individual works is always present in my research, from very early on I decided that it would play a secondary role to this focus on the processes and spaces of art.

There are a multitude of approaches to experimental research practices but Last (2012, p. 706) suggests common themes of ‘challenging methodological limitations or wishing to play a more active part in the production of space.’ As she indicates, the diversity of approach is a strength of experimental research practices, however it also raises questions of whether or not by becoming so inter-disciplinary, experimental research practices are diluting their individual component parts, or indeed their message. It is important to note that ‘not all experimental geography is undertaken by geographers’ (Last, 2012, p. 707) however there is a shift to frame engagements within this disciplinary context. Two common features of these approaches are an engagement not only with the context but also the practice of creating works, and moving from this position of “participant observation” to “observant participant” that

emerged in the non-representational strand of geography (para Hawkins, 2013a, p. 199).

The idea of connecting with the practices of artists is central in cross-disciplinary research because it ‘enables a more substantive engagement with the work in question’ (Hawkins, 2013a, p. 7). This is linked to non-representational theory and its focus on ‘world forming ... the everyday performative practices across the sciences and the arts’ (Dewsbury, 2010, p. 150). A focus on the ‘performative practices’ employed by Bosnian artists was therefore essential to engage with ideas around the spaces and identities formed through artistic practices. Much like the approach to artistic engagements with and creation of place in Bosnia, the identities performed through art practices highlight the ways in which this offers Bosnian citizens a way to identify out of common narratives and stereotypes of the region. It is a ‘world forming’ process that needs to be engaged with in order to understand the alternative geographies of postwar Bosnia. There are no truth claims but rather, by showing the formation of these other identities and spaces, we reveal the multiple and contradictory nature of truth, memory and history.

In discussing the artist Amy Houghton’s work on Gertrude Benham, Hawkins (2013) talks about her own investigation of Benham’s history, combined with discussions and engagements with Houghton’s work on the topic. Both doing and reflecting on this process helped Hawkins (2013) to highlight how in the case of missing data, art almost acts in a phenomenological sense. The missing data in this project is more obvious than it is in my research however, I feel that this was a useful point of reference for art features in my research and its role in moving forward the literature on fragmentation in Bosnia. In a sense, what I am investigating is missing data on Bosnia and viewing my approach as one informed by phenomenology helped to understand the ways in which art can bring forward the people, spaces and narratives left out of current studies and dialogues. Exploring contemporary Bosnia through artistic practices was especially helpful in this sense because again, it avoids truth claims. As Foster and Lorimer (2007, p. 429) note, ‘visual routes can deflect easy interpretation and polarized thinking ... engaging senses which are not disciplined. Art therefore pushes these senses in the social sciences, helping to go beyond attempts at representation.

## **Reflections on participatory approaches**

As a geographer with a background in languages and social sciences, I am forced to reflect on my ability to engage with art and what mutually assistive role we play for each other. Dewsbury (2010, p. 155) states that there is something about art that is truly non-representational and that geographers are not necessarily artists, but can ‘exhibit ... honest, anxious and therefore artistic, endeavours to grapple with representation through thought.’ Whereas other scholars (Foster and Lorimer, 2007; Hawkins, 2013a; Rendell, 2007) cite a mutually beneficial review process by mixing disciplines, aiding in the sense of adopting a new perspective from which to judge previous methods of addressing issues ‘before returning in order to suggest alternative modes of enquiry’ (Rendell, 2010, p. 150).

In working alongside artists in Bosnia I had to adapt to a very different mental and organisational framework. Whilst I do not think that I have direct experience of Rendell’s (2010) point, engaging with artists and cultural workers has helped me to expand on my methods of analyzing and interacting with artists and art practices; and I believe that through my research and writings on Tač.ka’s *Ars Kozara* project (Whelan, 2014), I have maybe provided them with an alternative framework through which to discuss their work. It is also important to note a mutual acknowledgement that, whilst I am not an artist, there are some similarities between my research and the work of artists in Bosnia. For example, both attempt to present creative and open representations of Bosnia to counter the more closed interpretations that dominate existing studies.

As a researcher it is essential to acknowledge the performativity of research (Davies and Dwyer, 2007), to be aware that ‘(w)hen we write or speak, we are not decoding the world, we are creating worlds’ (Dewsbury, 2010, p. 158). Performativity is a two-way street and one cannot see things as subjects or objects, but as processes that inform each other (para O’Reilly, 2012, p. 6). Rogoff (2000, para p. 31) argues that visual cultures can help us to explore the newer focus on ‘representation and situated knowledge’ over the ‘logical-positivist world of cognition’. In exploring visual cultures, I therefore to some extent started from a point of pre-acknowledged subjectivity. Just as artists are creating worlds through their work, I am creating one in my interpretation of these worlds. Attempts to avoid this included reading and



exploring as much material as possible from a variety of sources and continually clarifying that art does not speak for everyone in Bosnia but rather hints at alternative narratives. My hope is that my research also provokes questions and interest to explore and further contribute to deeper knowledge of the region.

Related to questions of positionality are some issues I had with participation in relation to my work. Participation has become quite a popular research practice, not only in creative geographies but also in the field of human geography more broadly. The push to have some shared project and/or research goal is held up as the pinnacle of engagement. Whilst I do not discredit its benefits, I think there are some problems if we think of it as a universally applicable principle. Therefore whilst I tried to be in some ways a “participant” myself in order to strengthen my engagement with artists and art practices in Bosnia, I do not think that this approach, which in art specifically has mostly been applied in Western Europe and North America, is overly helpful in a non-Western context.

Participatory research is based on the idea of shared goals and outputs, often involving some element of co-development of a project. One of the many benefits to this approach is connected with the non-representational focus on performativity and multiplicity, that ‘(i)f we are part of a co-emergent web of entanglements that intra-actively co-produce the real, then “representation” is simply not possible’ (Kerr, 2008, p. 66). Good and engaged research produces more questions and multiple world theories/knowledge, which is especially relevant when arguing against a fairly singular Balkanist discourse that dominates international handling of Bosnia. The aim of my research was not to present the “truth” but the multiple truths that make up the complicated history and present of the region. Being engaged with a group (Tač.ka) and a project (*Ars Kozara*) allowed me to immerse myself in the processes of engagement with histories, spaces and truths in non-linear or non-representational ways.

Hawkins (2013) employs the concept of ‘residency’, which is usually used when referring to artists but can be thought of in terms of the geographer’s role. There are many definitions but she views it as a reflection on dwelling, engagement, and entanglement with sites. This links with reflections on the question of how art helps us

to embody things: if '(i)t is through bodies that we live and know space ... (then can we) through art ... find the resources to study the form and dynamics of these spatial doings of bodies' (Hawkins, 2013, p. 183)? Incorporating this with the idea that through journeys, we learn about the personal, political, imaginary, real and so on, opens up a space in which to reflect on alternative practices of exploring.

Aside from my two-week "residencies" at *Ars Kozara* (2014 and 2015), I had two long-term "residencies" in Prijedor. Based on preliminary fieldwork in February 2014 and previous experience and research in the region between 2012 and 2013, I chose to base myself in Prijedor with the art collective Tač.ka. The rationale for this focus was multifaceted. First, Tač.ka and their work are geographically and politically interesting, and the issues raised in their work have broader implications for the study of contemporary art practices in Bosnia. Particularly, their work connects well with the concept of *anti-political art* in contrast to the more straightforward "art with a social purpose" case studies commonly found in examinations of art in Bosnia (See for example Simmons, 2010). Whilst Tač.ka's work certainly connects with important political issues, a central critique within their work is of this overt pressure to define art in the region in terms of these issues. This is, I feel, a reflection within *an* art world of broader postwar identity issues in Bosnia.

Second, Prijedor's incorporation into the autonomous region of Republika Srpska places it in a position of duality (both belonging and not belonging) therefore presenting an alternative context to explore, compared to artists in Mostar or Sarajevo (part of the Federation). This positionality should not make a difference to its position as Bosnian and is part of what Tač.ka is pushing for: a denial of the distinction between entities in Bosnia. However, there is a strong tendency to speak of Bosnia in terms of the Federation and consider Republika Srpska as something separate. Tač.ka is one of the most consistently active groups in Bosnia, yet is largely ignored by international academics and institutions. This presented a unique opportunity to engage with a group outside of the usual focus sites, which are Sarajevo and Mostar; whilst also highlighting and exploring the fact that within the region, there is a great deal of cooperation, networking and acknowledgment of each other's work.

Finally, Tač.ka provides a platform for young artists and a space to engage physically with ideas of place (Kozara), as well as creating work that contests the highly closed and politicised nature of cultural funding and institutions in Bosnia. Their collaborations and connections are wide reaching within the region, as well as migrations within the group acting as a useful element to explore.

Embedding myself in the town of Prijedor outside of the *Ars Kozara* event allowed me the practical benefit of being able to spend more time with Tač.ka members and negotiate my position in the group. However it also allowed me the methodological benefit of exploring the personal and political spaces of the municipality, which contributed to my understanding of the art practices, networks and struggles faced by artists in Bosnia, and the less-explored site of Republika Srpska.

Selecting existing projects is useful in this sense, however it also somewhat restricts the level of participation. I have had to negotiate my position within the groups and the extent to which I can be a participant myself. This differs from existing artist-geographer collaborations, such as Hawkins' *Caravanserai* (Hawkins, 2013a), which are generally co-developed by artists and researchers. However, much previous research has taken place in Western Europe or the USA and for me, it is important that I do not impose projects on artists in a context where there already exist a number of limitations and pressures. I view my participation in the sense of offering my skills in whatever ways they could be employed, maintaining open and informal relationships with the main artists I worked with, and cultivating open flows and exchanges of ideas.

### **Data gathering and analysis**

The main focus of the research was Tač.ka and more specifically, their *Ars Kozara* project. This led to an interest in ongoing or annual projects, and therefore an approach to data collection that worked around key event periods. A pilot trip to Prijedor and Banja Luka was conducted February 15<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> 2014. This was to get better acquainted with Tač.ka and the context in which they work, in order to think through how the methodology would progress. This provided multiple contacts through 'gatekeeper' and 'snowballing' processes (Valentine, 1997), where Nemanja Čađo and Tač.ka acted as trusted links to the wider art community (Valentine, 1997).

My subsequent meetings with artists, art historians, NGOs, curators and so on helped to start a process of continual referral, also known as ‘snowballing’ (Valentine, 1997). I spent just over three months in Bosnia in summer 2014 to conduct the first part of my fieldwork and repeated a similar period in summer 2015 (around five months), in order to have both archival comparatives and two experiences of key events to build on and compare. In total, the in-country fieldwork was around eight months, with ongoing online research and communication in between.

I recorded visual as well as audio data, using a digital camera and recorder that was backed up daily during the fieldwork periods on my computer, external hard drive and cloud storage system. First I will discuss visual data. In terms of what I collected, I took my own photos of spaces, works and working processes (where possible); I examined original materials, whether at galleries, studios or private spaces; I collected exhibition catalogues; and I did online research of artists’ work. As Gillian Rose (2001) argues, there is no single set method to analyse this visual data but she sets out some variants and proposes a mixed methodology. The five modes of analysis she outlines are: compositional, which she links with more traditional art historical approaches; then content analysis, semiology, psychoanalysis and discourse analysis. All have their benefits, although some are mostly irrelevant to my research. I therefore combined elements from each, which altered depending on the work. I will not outline each of these processes here but simply state the underlying logic behind Rose’s (2001) and my own approach to analysing visual data.

Accepting that ‘visual images do not exist in a vacuum’ (Rose, 2001, p. 37) means that an inclusion of all elements in the analysis is necessary. This extends from the image itself to the modes of production and display, how they function discursively, and audience/critical reception. Whilst I do not go into great depth on the latter point, acknowledging the multiple visualities present amongst audiences is important. Connected to this, an element of Rose’s (2001) theory on discourse analysis in relation to visual data is particularly interesting to me: her focus on the modes and spaces of display. Since I am interested in how art functions geographically and politically, it was useful to include not only an examination of images themselves, but also how various spaces and structures of display affect the ways in which art is seen. This

element was of particular importance in my research, therefore somewhat undermining analysis of individual artworks in themselves.

Audio data consisted of recorded interviews and artist presentations (with permission). Fairly soon into my research period I chose informal over formal interview styles, making my position as a researcher clear at all times and clearly taking notes in front of participants. However, I found that an informal style created better conversations and a sense of being more equal. There is also the problem that artists, especially more established ones, tend to have a very politician-like approach to talking about their work in interviews. It is very difficult sometimes to get a sense of anything outside of the exhibition catalogues. With some, an informal approach made no difference. But generally my focus on an informal approach and upcoming artists was very specifically chosen to try to get beyond distanced art-historical approaches. In total, I have only nine formally recorded interviews and panels, but twenty recorded artist presentations from *Ars Kozara*, and material collected from meetings and engagements with over fifty artists and cultural workers. This is in addition to all of the background research I completed that includes the portfolios of around one hundred artists, not counting sources I have used from the Yugoslav period.

In terms of the data I did record, I tried to transcribe it as soon as possible, using Express Scribe<sup>10</sup> software to speed up the process. I prefer a system of manual coding as opposed to using software such as NVivo. This is because I feel that by manually coding, it is possible to explore data more fully and as I am including a large amount of informal observations, analysis of artworks and ethnographic notes, it is easier to incorporate these into manual rather than digital coding processes. As my fieldwork was split over an 18-month period, I tried to split the coding accordingly so that 1) the first research period could inform subsequent research; 2) I would not be overwhelmed with data at the end of my fieldwork periods; and 3) the information I recorded would still be relatively fresh in my mind. Data in Bosnian /Serbian/Croatian language was only translated as needed. With this data I find it more useful for me, since it is not my native language, to make notes on the text and only translate quotes I include directly.

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<sup>10</sup> This software allows you to control audio in the background whilst typing, making it easier to stop and rewind when needed. It is not a programme like Dragon Transcription, which transcribes audio for you.

The question of language is important. I have invested a great deal of time in learning Bosnian /Serbian/Croatian over the last three years and am now at a B2 level (assessed by a professional language teacher). I am able to read and write with relative ease, and conduct some interviews and daily tasks/conversations in the language. However, it is an extremely complex language and I am not fluent, which raises the question of the extent to which it is useful to conduct all interviews and conversations in Bosnian /Serbian/Croatian. Most of the artists and other interviewees spoke very good English and some even felt more comfortable having discussions with me in English, either because they wanted to practice or because they felt uncomfortable seeing me, at times, struggling. For interviews with artists where the primary focus is not on mere facts, but on feelings, interpretations and so on, it is not always easy to have a natural conversation in Bosnian /Serbian/Croatian. I therefore used it as a tool rather than my primary language during fieldwork.

By having a good knowledge of the language I have been able to expand the number of people and materials I was able to engage with, as well as help out if participants got stuck on words in English. There is also a degree of respect and gratitude shown by people that a foreigner has bothered to learn their language. It is not a major world language and many foreigners in the region are content to rely on English. On a more practical level, it also allowed me to negotiate a more embedded position within Tač.ka as a translator, and to be able to understand and experience how artists engage with each other naturally in their own language. In sum, I mixed languages in my research with the primary language for formal interviews being English.

My project was exempt from needing formal ethics approval due to fact that I was not engaging with vulnerable members of society or traumatic subjects. Trauma is a key issue when studying art in contemporary Bosnia but I was not asking people to talk to me directly about their own personal traumas outside of what they wished to share. My engagement with the topic of trauma is at a more abstract level, exploring the extent to which engagement with this in art is problematic or forced. I am not researching private traumas and their representation in art. However, I remained aware that traumatic memories may have been raised during the course of my research and that I should be sensitive towards this. No incidents of particular controversy or upset

occurred during fieldwork, other than having to remain generally sensitive to the general malaise of life for citizens of Bosnia. By this I mean that due to economic, political and historical processes, things can get very dark very quickly in Bosnia. Knowing how to respond to this is not always easy because there are so many narrow lines between shallow or patronising sympathy, and total ignorance. I, as a researcher from the UK, do not live that life or understand fully that sense of being trapped by geography and circumstance. I therefore had to remain sensitive to these issues and how best to respond.

In terms of consent and representation, although artists are public figures, the option of anonymity was always offered, and anything I viewed as potentially controversial or misunderstood was either verified with them or automatically anonymised/excluded. The very fact that they are public figures and work in public spaces means that although anonymity is not a huge concern, misrepresentation is. It was therefore important for me to feedback to the artists I was working with, especially members of my key focus group: Tač.ka. This was not at the expense of my own research aims but I did use this continual feedback as a means of proxy consent. I do not dismiss consent but in the context of Bosnia and the artists I engage with, having formal consent forms is quite a distancing format. It is important to have comfortable relationships and conversations with artists in order to establish a sense of trust. I have been careful to ensure that artists are aware of my research focus enough to feel informed, but not enough for it to influence their responses and I favour verbal over written consent. I will not share any data outside of my own research without participants' consent and any cases that I viewed as problematic were handled with care i.e. by using anonymity or joint consideration of appropriateness.

Risk assessment was not required beyond the scope of any other research project because Bosnia is no longer at war and more generally, there are low levels of violence and crime. Therefore safety considerations followed a standard pattern: ensuring that friends/family/colleagues in Bosnia and at home knew where I was and when, and that they had contact details for me at all times; avoiding travelling alone at night where possible; and being sensitive to topics and situations that might place me in an unsafe position. I was also comfortable enough with the language and environment, and had made some very close friends and contacts in the region, so I

did not feel vulnerable or isolated. In the context of staying safe in natural environments (specifically Kozara National Park, where *Ars Kozara* takes place), I never went to these locations alone and all of the artists in Tač.ka are former boy scouts, something that is common in Bosnia, and therefore spent a significant part of their childhood and teenage years on Kozara.



## **Chapter Five: Engaging with contested spaces – the fragmented narratives of art and history**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the context of Kozara National Park in order to demonstrate the ways in which art engages with contested contexts and spaces. A central issue that I encountered during my research in Bosnia is how to resolve the conflict between what some people view as “ignoring” or “forgetting” the past versus allowing the continued escalation of competing cults of commemoration (Miller, 2007). This conflict is present in both the country as a whole, and the more specific world of art and cultural production. Using my in-depth research in the region, I demonstrate how art adds additional contextual layers to controversial spaces without removing or ignoring the past.

A key issue that my research raises is that the cult of commemoration in Bosnia is both state and internationally-sanctioned. It is therefore allowed to spread and obscures progress in other areas. By this I mean that the country is held back from functioning as a normal state because money is channeled into competing memorialisation projects rather than things such as infrastructure, education or work opportunities. This commemorative race in turn flares up disputes between ethno-nationalist political elites, which subsequently derails genuine political action. My argument is that by creating spaces for non-political or antipolitical work, as well as directly political or socially engaged works, artistic practices can help to broaden engagements with Bosnia and create spaces for dialogue and progress.

First I explore themes of trauma and memory by outlining the history and politics of Kozara National Park and the shifting political narratives of this site from the Second World War to present day. I then examine the ways that my key case study, *Ars Kozara*, engages with and disrupts these narratives in creative ways. I demonstrate how art has rehabilitated or reclaimed spaces, but not at the expense of ignoring the past, thus demonstrating how it is possible to both rehabilitate and commemorate spaces. This will introduce some of the key problems that are being debated in Bosnian art practices and broader academic studies, such as the Second World War, the wars of the nineties and post-Dayton politics.

By focusing on work that is not directly political in relation to ethno-nationalism and war, my argument is not that these responses are better than those that seek direct engagement. Instead my research demonstrates the need to disentangle art from these competing cults of commemoration perpetuated and supported by those in power in order to maintain the status quo. By opening out the literature to focus on broader engagements with contested spaces, my research highlights the people, spaces and narratives left out of current studies and engagements with Bosnia.

This chapter therefore contributes to the broader objectives of the thesis by expanding the literature on Bosnia beyond orthodox political actors and processes to include artists and art practices, building on feminist and subaltern critiques of geopolitics to engage with 'the people *on* the map' and include their agency in the research (Koopman, 2011, p. 275). It also rethinks the connections between art, politics and space, building on the concept of a 'destigmatized geography of art' (T. Kaufmann, 2004), one in which artists are not bound up in particular or singular expectations based on geo-historical context. In this way, my research builds on Shapiro's (2012) concept that creative practices contribute to evolving memories and images of the past, and Rancière's (2010) thoughts on art making up one of the many folds of reality to be analysed as part of a system, rather than a mirror or representation.

### **Reworking memory and trauma in Kozara National Park**



*Figure 5.1: Map showing the location of Kozara National Park, Kozarac and Prijedor*

Kozara Mountain and the surrounding area became a focus for memorialisation following the extreme violence of the Second World War because it was a key battle

site for the Partisan resistance against the occupying Ustaša and Nazi forces. Here I will draw on historical accounts of the park and surrounding area in order to situate more recent artistic interventions there. The mountain is located in the municipality of Prijedor in Northwest Bosnia, in what is now Republika Srpska, around 40km from the main town of Prijedor, above the small town of Kozarac (see figure 5.1). During the Second World War, the interwar Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was broken up between occupying fascist forces and resistance groups. The Independent State of Croatia (NDH) aligned itself with Germany, whilst resistance forces in Bosnia and Serbia fought for freedom from the fascist occupation. The NDH forces called themselves Ustaša, whilst resistance forces included the Partisans and the Četniks. There was conflict between the resistance forces because the Četniks were Royalist Serbs whereas the Partisans were fighting to establish a secular, socialist, unified state.<sup>11</sup> The Kozara Offensive of 1942 saw the establishment of several free areas by largely outnumbered Partisan forces who suffered significant losses. There were more losses to follow as a reverse offensive by the Ustaša led to the death and destruction of local populations, with large numbers being sent to nearby concentration camps. Exact figures on the number of losses of Partisan fighters and Bosnian citizens have been a source of conflict for decades, but political scientists Sahovic and Zulumovic (2015, p. 211) state that rough averages place the figures for Kozara alone at ‘sixty-eight thousand casualties ... twenty-four thousand of whom were children.’

Following the Second World War, Kozara was primarily a site of local remembrance to mourn those lost but as the area became increasingly tied up in political narratives of war and the Partisan struggle, state level ceremonies started intruding on local practices (Sahovic and Zulumovic, 2015). From the 1950s onwards local and federal communist leaders began attending ceremonies, which were then absorbed into larger holidays, such as 4<sup>th</sup> July Comrades Day and 27<sup>th</sup> July Day of National Rebellion in Bosnia (Sahovic and Zulumovic, 2015, p. 211). As historian Max Bergholz (2013) notes, these holidays joined the National Parks programme as part of a broader strategy of building a united Yugoslav identity. Tito had begun the national parks programme in 1949, so the establishment of Kozara as a park and official memorial site in 1967 was relatively late. Sahovic and Zulumovic (2015) argue that a reason for

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<sup>11</sup> In the later wars of the nineties, Ustaša and Četnik became derogatory terms for Croats and Serbs respectively.

this is because, despite its significance, Kozara was one of the few major battles that took place without Tito present. However, the mountain and surrounding area became central to official iconography as the first site where the Partisans directly defended large civilian populations, thus becoming the People's Army (Sahovic and Zulumovic, 2015). In their discussion of the role of National Parks in Nation building, Frost and Hall (2012, p. 63) state that landscapes become iconographies in which 'heritage and nationhood may be tangibly represented.' National parks and the encouragement of tourism to them, for various reasons, were a key part of nation-building around the world (Dlouhy, 1999, p. 99). Kozara was no different and became a symbol of Bosnia, which in turn became a symbol of Yugoslavia – different ethnicities joining together in the fight against fascism.

Memorial sites at Kozara are quite spread out, as artist Davor Paponja states: 'the conflict was in so many areas that you can find simply anywhere a monument to the Unknown Soldier and such,'<sup>12</sup> which is true of Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly, but is unusual in such a concentrated area. The park therefore became a complex rather than a stand-alone memorial site, with a monument at Mrakovica built as its centre five years following its establishment. Sahovic and Zulumovic (2015, p. 212) explain the layout and design of the monument in the following way, which the photographs below (figures 5.2 and 5.3) demonstrate visually:

The thirty-four-metre-high concrete monument itself is placed on a plateau representing the 'freedom-loving spirit of the people of Kozara' with three-dimensional 'rays' made of concrete representing forces surrounding the Partisan fighters surround the central monument. The layout symbolizes the rise of the people in face of an overpowering enemy.

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<sup>12</sup> 'je sukob bio na tolikom prostoru da se jednostavno svuda može naći neki spomenik neznatom junaku i slično' Davor Paponja: artist and Ars Kozara participant 2013 and 2014. Translated extract from transcript of panel discussion on Ars Kozara at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka (19/09/2014)



*Figure 5.2: Mrakovica memorial, Kozara National Park, 24 August 2014*



*Figure 5.3: Aerial view of Mrakovica memorial, 2005. Photo courtesy of Kozara National Park Press Office*

Designed by Dušan Džamonija, a famous Yugoslav sculptor, the monument avoids figurist traditions common to most memorials outside of the former Yugoslavia. This is due to a direct initiative in Yugoslavia to create inclusive war monuments to symbolize identification with *the* people rather than simply people. However the

Kozara monument was built entirely on donations, whereas most in the region were built using federal reserves (Sahovic and Zulumovic, 2015). This demonstrates both the powerful symbolism of Kozara and local connection to the site.

During the conflict of the nineties, Kozara itself was not significant but it was surrounded by destruction, with the site of the detention camps at Omarska viewable from the park's other mountain (Gola planina) and its close proximity to the mostly Muslim town of Kozarac. During the conflict, this town was razed to the ground by Serb paramilitary forces and its population dispersed across detention camps, and refugee centres within and beyond the borders of Bosnia. So two extremely violent historical periods are strongly connected to Kozara and the surrounding area. As historian Paul Miller (2007) highlights in his research on contested memories in Bosnia, what makes the situation even more complex are the ways in which these events have been woven into political dialogues and competing cults of commemoration. Miller (2007) is discussing the period during and following the war of the nineties, when Kozara became a divisive tool for competing ethno-nationalist warring parties. However Sahovic and Zulumovic's (2015, p. 216) research demonstrates that '[i]n [the] short period after communism and before the war of 1992-1995, the monument was [also] highly politicised' but in the multi-ethnic sense of Marković<sup>13</sup> trying to keep the state of Yugoslavia together. Miller (2007) argues that following the war and breakup of Yugoslavia, as Muslim suffering became increasingly commemorated in Bosnia, identification of spaces such as Kozara as sites of uniquely Serb suffering during the Second World War became more common. For example, following the war the museum replaced its permanent Second World War exhibition with one entitled 'Three genocides against the Serbs', which remained until 1999 (Miller, 2006). Now the original exhibition is back but as Sahovic and Zulumovic (2015, p. 222) argue, 'focusing on victimhood and suffering of the people is still far from the original message [of the Yugoslav monuments] of antifascist resistance, freedom and unification.' This demonstrates how the ways in which previous traumas are remembered mutate along with political events. My research picks up on this critique of the race to commemorate and claim spaces such as Kozara

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<sup>13</sup> Ante Marković was the last prime minister of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1989 - 1991

as ethnically specific sites of trauma, and demonstrates how regional artists are engaging with spaces outside of these constraints.

My main focus in studying art in controversial contexts is to demonstrate the strength of recontextualising or normalising spaces through artistic practice. So with the absorption and manipulation of Kozara into various political agendas, my research considers how art can disrupt these processes and the problems of excluding alternative narratives from studies of Bosnia and art practices more broadly. Art historian and cultural theorist Claire Bishop (2012) argues that cultural production can play an important role in addressing events and divisions of the past, and that it can represent an opportunity for people to re-engage and reframe issues outside of traditional structures. I agree with her to an extent but in post-conflict spaces, I am particularly interested to demonstrate how art can be political without claiming this as its purpose, and how the political exerts pressure within artistic spheres that mirror pressures in society at large. The artistic strategies I engage with particularly are antipolitical, a strategy that is used to align work outside of debates over commemoration and ethnicity. This is because in Bosnia, people have been subjected to constant reframings by external and internal political actors (Ó Tuathail, 1996). The peoples of the former Yugoslavia have been particularly controlled in terms of how they are perceived by others. This extends to the art world, in which we see pressures to speak about war, ethnicity and divisions, which reinforce these narratives regardless of whether or not they are meaningful for the individual. As artist Borjana Mrđa explains:

The perception of a place as a cultural space... it is always affected by this perception of the state, or these borders, or positionalities. So you can never overcome that. You can never escape that. For example, one person told me – he's not from here - he saw some of my drawings and he told me, those drawings are not about the war. And I said why would I make work about the war? But it's your reality. I said, it was my reality but even if it was, there are many realities. Not only this one. He said but you wouldn't make it. I said why would I want to make a plan how to make it – what do you mean by that? He said, but artists from Bosnia, they only succeed if they are dealing with war themes. Do you know that? Do you know that this is the perception of

your country? Do you know that people outside, they want people like that. It's interesting for them. The artists like that. The other artists, the art that you make – you can find anywhere. Why would I want to see the art from Bosnia like that? And I said I don't know what to tell you.<sup>14</sup>

This anecdote provides a vivid demonstration of how Bosnian artists are pressured or induced into making work along lines defined by outsiders. In art, as in other spheres, who remembers and how is still being externally defined. Artists currently have to face a crossroad of either being accepted into anti-war frameworks by dealing with overtly political themes, or be accused of whitewashing the past and assumed to be part of ethno-national frameworks of remembering and forgetting. Any position in between is marginalised. What I want to show is how in a country that is still at the mercy of the whims of international and national elites, alternative art practices can add complex layers to place without whitewashing their violent histories. In doing so, I also demonstrate how being a postwar artist in Bosnia carries its own forms of politics. One of the few groups in the region to tackle these questions and expand the forms and fields of expression open to young artists in Bosnia is Tač.ka. Faced with collective problems and limitations in art practice, they turned to land art and Kozara.

*Ars Kozara* is an annual 'art in nature laboratory' that since 2007 has provided a platform for young artists and connected their work and practices with the specificities of the park. With a focus on creating a dialogue between people and space, the project gathers together people from all over the former Yugoslavia. A political connection certainly cannot be denied but it is not a forced one. The politics present in all of Tač.ka's work is one that I consider *antipolitical* political art. It is not apathy but a process of *identifying out* in order to provoke questioning of the status quo. This can be related back to Kemp-Welch's (2013) discussion of antipolitics in Central-East European art movements of the twentieth century. As Kemp-Welch (2013) explains, the rejection of politics by artists was part of a refusal to be absorbed into mainstream debates or provide a readymade revolutionary art movement. A central critique in Tač.ka's work addresses the pressure to identify and engage with the geopolitical narratives that have framed Bosnia's recent past. By allowing artists the freedom to engage with environments on their own terms, *Ars Kozara* represents one of the few

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Borjana Mrđa: artist and professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy (17/06/2014)



spaces in which to publicly explore alternative representations of Bosnia without institutional limitations. Considering its history as a political tool, Kozara is therefore an apt location. The main draws for Tač.ka in selecting the park as the project site were its proximity to the members' hometown of Prijedor, the strong local connection to the mountain and surrounding areas, and the desire to work in nature. However, the selection of Kozara can also be seen as a way of liberating both art and the mountain from the frameworks they have so far been limited to.

In my research I explore not only the artistic engagements with place and land art that occur during *Ars Kozara*, but also how these new artistic spaces relate to existing narratives of the area. I suggest that recontextualising spaces and identities does not have to be at the expense of removing existing contexts: multiple realities are possible and present in art. But the issue for artists coming from contested places such as Bosnia is that the problem of context that manifests itself everywhere becomes particularly heightened and narrow. It is therefore important to examine works that open up these contexts.

In the most general sense, the *Ars Kozara* project has multiple layers of significance. First, for the artists involved it is important to connect with each other and with the space of Kozara, forming different relationships with the history, politics and structure of the site. Second, the way that park visitors connect with the space is also altered by the artistic interventions of *Ars Kozara* participants. The significance of these interactions might be totally different from the experiences of the artists, for example a surprise encounter or something fun for children. However, the overall effect for both visitors and regional artists is that the project helps to escape the idea that the *only* things that happened at Kozara were negative, whilst not erasing that past. Tač.ka director and coordinator of *Ars Kozara*, Nemanja Čađo informed me that tourist posts on social media sites were actually key in getting greater acknowledgement and assistance from the administration of Kozara National Park.<sup>15</sup> Up until 2013, other than granting permission for Tač.ka to use the park, the administration offered no support or acknowledgement, such as logistical aid or signposting. Following the increase in number, size and location of artworks, more tourist photos began appearing on social media websites and subsequently, the administration welcomed

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Nemanja Čađo: artist and Tač.ka coordinator (21/02/2014)

*Ars Kozara* as an integral part of Kozara National Park. When I spoke with the park's administration department, they confirmed that tourists react very positively to the artworks and that it adds something special to Kozara.<sup>16</sup>

For the staff of Kozara National Park, the significance of *Ars Kozara* is mainly touristic, commercial and fun, which for some is problematic because they view it as trivialising art practices and politics. Artist and activist Emir Hodžić, whilst supportive of Tač.ka's work, is not so positive about the more superficial public encounters '(b)ecause cultural centres, cultural events, are exclusively in the realm of promoting, say, the city as a tourist place – look how beautiful and colourful it is, the beautiful colourful murals.'<sup>17</sup> However, I want to argue that there is room for both serious conceptual encounters and fun public ones, especially as a way of exposing children and the wider public to art. Of course Emir is in some sense referring to the problems associated with events being absorbed into broader political narratives. If projects such as *Ars Kozara* do not openly speak against certain narratives, they can easily be accepted by political elites and held as representative of something they do not wish to be associated with. In this case, Republika Srpska politicians can appropriate and misrepresent antipolitical projects by using the publicity and tourism to promote the entity as a progressive and modern place, whilst ignoring the fact that politically, Tač.ka and the Republika Srpska government are worlds apart. The antipolitical stance of projects such as *Ars Kozara* can therefore be put in jeopardy.

This section has outlined the context of Kozara and the *Ars Kozara* project within it. In the following section I will expand on the question of reworking memory and trauma in Kozara National Park by analysing selected works from *Ars Kozara* (2007-15).

### **Artistic engagements with place: selected works from *Ars Kozara* (2007-2015)**

Artistic interventions in Kozara National Park are both significant and under-researched. As I have outlined in the previous section, the site is laden with history,

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Nataša Pjević: PR officer for Kozara National Park (07/07/2014)

<sup>17</sup> 'jer ni kulturni centri, kulturna zbivanja su isključivo u domenu, za svrhu imaju promocije recimo grada kao nekog turističkog mjesta, vidi kako je ovdje lijepo i šareno, imamo šarene murale.' Emir Hodžić: artist and activist. Translated extract from transcript of guerilla panel discussion/action *Noć Muzeja* (18/05/2015)

much of which is unresolved, but artistic engagements with it have so far tried to avoid being tied to this. It is therefore an important case study through which to explore questions surrounding the changing faces of memory and trauma in Kozara specifically and Bosnia more broadly. Tracing the history and structure of the site, I aim to shed light on the competing narratives of Kozara and the position of artistic practices within this space through an examination of selected works from the art collective Tač.ka's *Ars Kozara* project (2007-2015). Engaging with emerging literature on geography and art highlights the ways in which art initiatives might help us to start thinking differently about Bosnia specifically, as well as post-conflict spaces more broadly.

The deployment of creative practices in the context of political geography has allowed scholars to build on feminist and subaltern critiques of critical geopolitics by moving studies beyond elite representations (Williams, 2014) to consider creative workings of space and power. However, such work has often focused on Western contexts. My research broadens the literature by considering the transferability of such approaches and the specificities of art in relation to the political geography of Bosnia.

Drawing on a variety of examples of artworks from *Ars Kozara*, both political and non-political, I demonstrate the value of broadening approaches to art in traumatised spaces. Although the overall approach of *Ars Kozara* is one that I would define as antipolitical, the project highlights the diversity of such approaches. It is not apathy but a process of *identifying out* in order to provoke a questioning of the status quo. This can be related back to Kemp-Welch's (2013) discussion of antipolitics in Central-East European art movements of the twentieth century. As she explains, the rejection of politics by artists was part of a refusal to be absorbed into mainstream debates or provide a readymade revolutionary art movement. A central critique in Tač.ka's work addresses the pressure to identify and engage with the geopolitical narratives that have framed Bosnia's recent past.

In the last two editions of *Ars Kozara* (2014 and 2015) especially, which I was personally present for and involved in, the works were extremely varied in form and content with themes ranging from urban pollution, to the Second World War, responsibility and relationships towards nature, walking practices, astrology and

smileys. Contrary to many expectations of 'Bosnian' or 'ex-Yugoslav' art, there was nothing about recent history or ethnic identity. This is not to say that historically there have not been artworks that engage with this. However, a survey of the project's history shows the range and possibilities of post-Yugoslav art beyond violent conflict.

To illustrate this, I will discuss selected works that relate to three broad themes: land art and human relationships with nature, historical events in and around Kozara mountain, and contemporary politics. First, I explore the pure Land Art themes of Goran Čupić's contributions (2012-14) to the project. I will then discuss two artists who bridged this approach with historical/political themes: Nela Hasanbegović (2009) and Marko Crnobrnja (2012). Of course all of the works at *Ars Kozara* are Land Art by default. However, these three pieces connect to Land Art as a concept, rather than using it as a medium through which to express a concept or elaborate on earlier work in other forms.

Although Tač.ka members are clear to stress that *Ars Kozara* is 'not only about Land Art',<sup>18</sup> it is important to consider what the specificities of Land Art are. The idea that art has a specific aesthetic function denied to other forms because it is free to engage and critique, rather than merely present facts has been put forward by scholars such as Bennett (para 2012, p. 6). This is perhaps nowhere more true than in the case of land art, due to its position as a contextually driven and dependent art form. In the broadest of terms, Land Art can include any interaction with physical landscape – whether urban or rural. In practice the manifestation of this is distinct in each case (Alfrey, 2013). There was a strong move towards land art in Britain in the 60s and 70s. It was very natural and organic, drawing on a long historical tradition, yet enabling 'the landscape to become the ground of radical artistic experiment' (Alfrey, 2013, p. 11). Often seen as an attempt to rehabilitate the past, the land art of *Ars Kozara* can also be seen as an attempt to rehabilitate the present, adding contextual layers to Kozara as a place. The idea of 'radical experiment' is also reflected in Tač.ka's identification of *Ars Kozara* as an 'art in nature laboratory,' rather than simply a land art or art residency programme.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mladen Bundalo: artist and Tač.ka founding member (07/03/2014)



Figure 5.4: *Shooting Something* (2014), Goran Čupić, *Ars Kozara*

Goran Čupić (2014 work *Shooting Something* pictured above in figure 5.4) has been a regular *Ars Kozara* contributor since 2012 and his work outside of the project largely comprises of Land Art or projects working with natural materials. His work for the project demonstrates his ability to create large-scale, semi-spontaneous and seemingly fragile pieces that fit perfectly within the site. The concepts are simple and visually impressive, and are some of the most popular with both Tač.ka and visitors. He can really be seen as one of the few young Bosnian artists challenging what that term/category means because his projects transcend questions of ethnicity, nationalism, violence and war. His works at Kozara all reflect his connection to Land Art, with *Hive*<sup>19</sup> (2012) referencing ideas of shelter, *Motion*<sup>20</sup> (2013) referencing the work of British land artist Andy Goldsworthy and the ephemeral patterns of nature,

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<sup>19</sup> *Košnica*

<sup>20</sup> *Kretanje*

while *Shooting Something*<sup>21</sup> (2014) was a response to the floods which devastated parts of Bosnia and Serbia in May 2014. As I described in my report on *Ars Kozara* 2014 for the Sarajevo Culture Bureau:

Using segments of tree trunks cut in varying sizes, he (Čupić) created a flowing installation along one slope amongst the trees of the Glavuša site, with cracks amongst the carefully orchestrated collection of circles reflecting the damaged earth. The work draws attention to the power and fragility of nature and is a welcome tribute to the damaged land and livelihoods during the 2014 disaster (Whelan, 2014)

My argument is not that Čupić's work performs a specific function in relation to the themes of my thesis, but rather that taken as a whole, the inclusion of his work at Kozara adds contextual layers free from the burdens of history. The conceptual focus also ties the Bosnian art scene into broader global practices, and *Ars Kozara* into the broader history of Land Art. Being larger, Čupić's contributions also helped to signpost the Glavuša site as an open-air gallery, where some of the smaller or more concept-driven works failed due to either their lack of durability and/or small size.

Further illustrative of this connection to Land Art as a form, rather than as simply a way to illustrate the same repetitive themes in Bosnian art, are the works of Nela Hasanbegović (2009) and Marko Crnobrnja (2012). Their contributions to *Ars Kozara* bridge a pure Land Art theme with historical events. Both works embody a physical connection to the space, which is important in Land Art projects and the idea of Kozara as a traumatised site. However, although names, photos and concepts are documented by Tač.ka as well as the artists themselves, this information is not displayed. Tač.ka prefer to have as little accompanying information as possible – almost none at the physical site of Kozara – in order to encourage open encounters and interpretations. Thus past events are referenced indirectly and implicitly, in the titles and forms of the works, rather than directly or explicitly.

Hasanbegović, who is one of the most well-known and successful contemporary artists in Bosnia and a member of the Crvena<sup>22</sup> collective in Sarajevo, responded quite

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<sup>21</sup> *Pucanje Nečega*

spontaneously with *Healing*<sup>23</sup> (figure 5.5), thought up on-site while she was participating in the third edition of *Ars Kozara* (2009) with her Crvena partner, Lana Čmajčanin.<sup>24</sup> She and Lana had come up with sketches for their intended joint work, but in the space she was inspired to create something additional.<sup>25</sup> In her solo work, she bound up broken branches as a symbolic healing of the layers of history of Kozara. This relates to both the environment and the traumatic history of Kozara. The branches are bound like a human limb, so Hasanbegović is making a physical intervention in the space to heal broken nature. But the hidden level of meaning is open to those who sense it in the context of Kozara, and that is the need for healing traumatised spaces. The aim of *Healing* is a more open and veiled nod to historical trauma because it is not a direct statement on a concrete point in time. It could be read environmentally, in relation to The Second World War, or as a statement on recent Bosnian history. It also has an ephemeral quality, like *Ars Kozara* generally, so as traces of the work continue to disappear, its meaning and interpretation alter.



Figure 5.5: *Healing* (2009), Nela Hasanbegović, *Ars Kozara*. Photo courtesy of Tač.ka

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<sup>22</sup> Crvena is a feminist art collective based in Sarajevo

<sup>23</sup> *Iscjeljenje*

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Nela Hasanbegović: Artist, *Ars Kozara* participant and Crvena member (21/06/2014)

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Nela Hasanbegović: Artist, *Ars Kozara* participant and Crvena member (21/06/2014)





Figure 5.6: *Exit* (2012), Marko Crnobrnja, Ars Kozara. Photo courtesy of Tač.ka

Marko Crnobrnja's 2012 work *Exit* (figure 5.6) is situated on the National Park's other mountain, Gola Planina, and was the first of Kozara's large-scale projects. This was the first work to be installed outside of the main Glavuša site and Tač.ka members credit it for the rise of public and National Park interest in the *Ars Kozara* project. The work is a door so it could just as easily have focused on entering rather than exiting. The choice of the latter is significant to the physical site and Bosnia/ex-Yugoslavia more broadly. *Exit* references many issues connected to the former Yugoslavia: the exit of people during the war, the desire of many people still to leave, the exit of lands from a once unified state, exit from the park, and exit to the precipice of Gola Planina, from which point you can see in the distance the former detention camp at Omarska where Bosnian Muslims were held during the recent war in the nineties.<sup>26</sup>

The location was selected because it is along one of the main access roads to the park, allowing the work to stand alone as an imposing portal to who knows where. Crnobrnja chose a focus on 'exit' rather than 'enter' because of the negative problems

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<sup>26</sup> Andrej Bereta: Curator and Ars Kozara collaborator. Notes from transcript of panel discussion on Ars Kozara at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka (19/09/2014)



surrounding the loss of people and unity in the former Yugoslavia. However, for local participants and visitors, the work's position overlooking Omarska can lend it a slightly ominous quality. Like *Healing* (2009), *Exit* is open enough for audiences to bring their own meaning to it, even if that is simply as a quite popular tourist photo spot.

Having assessed the conceptual approach of land art to opening up traumatised spaces, I now discuss a work that contributes to debates on trauma and memorialisation. The postwar period in Bosnia has seen a race to erect ethnicised monuments in order to re-narrate history, which is a hangover from the Yugoslav period when monuments were erected apace to solidify the newly unified socialist republic. Monuments erected during the Yugoslav period were predominantly memorials to the partisan struggle. This means that essentially they are memorials to fighters, which even at that time could have been absorbed into “us” vs. “them” narratives. Predominantly they would have alienated the Croat fascist forces and the Serbian Četnik resistance, who were not part of the “winning” side. By erecting monuments that acted as such strong political reinforcements, victim-aggressor patterns were entrenched long before the recent wars of the nineties. The dead have therefore been constantly co-opted into discourses of the state as a justification of war, and memorialisation of state power.

So how can art practices help to rethink and reshape the ways in which the past is remembered or commemorated? As political scientist Jenny Edkins (2003, p. 6) states, trauma and memory are often shaped by dominant actors:

however (they are) not to be determined by them: their influence, and the state structure itself, can be contested and challenged. Forms of statehood in contemporary society, as forms of political community, are themselves produced and reproduced through social practices, including practices of trauma and memory.

In this way Davor Paponja and Miodrag Jović's 2014 work *Children of Kozara*<sup>27</sup> (figure 5.7) can be seen as performing their own practice of trauma and memory, even if it is not of an event from their lifetime.



Figure 5.7: Part of *Children of Kozara* (2014), Davor Paponja and Miodrag Jović

The work consists of secondhand toys suspended by silk thread from the trees. Conceptually the aim was:

to make some sort of site-specific intervention in the area that would be related to the Second World War period, where children died, where in fact we treat the forest as a random cemetery, something like that ... we went guided by this idea that socialism, where national heroes receive certain honors, monuments, meanings, and such; and children, they have no trace to leave behind.<sup>28</sup>

Here they are critiquing the habit of memorialisation, highlighting that it is not a new phenomenon, and suggesting that in the case of Kozara, the wrong things were

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<sup>27</sup> *Djeca Kozare*

<sup>28</sup> 'htjeli smo da napravimo neku vrstu sajta specifik intervencije u prostoru koja bi se referisala na taj neki ratni period drugi svjetski rat. gdje su djeca stradala, gdje u stvari, smo tretirali šumu kao neka random groblja, otprilike neke tako stvari ... smo išli vođeni tom idejom da u socijalizmu gdje su nac. heroji dobijali određene počasti, spomenike, pomene i slično. a djeca u tom nekom smislu nemaju nikakav trag koji bi ostavili za sobom.' Davor Paponja: artist and Ars Kozara participant 2013 and 2014. Translated extract from transcript of panel discussion on Ars Kozara at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka (19/09/2014)

commemorated. The death of children during wartime can of course still be used in fights over historical events, but Paponja and Jović's work aims to be a more open memorial by remaining free from explanation to the general public. It simply hangs in the air above Kozara like history and the questions surrounding historical events. Governments of the former Yugoslavia have repeatedly replaced memory with history in order to perform a coherent state identity. Engaging with these memory practices accesses something that 'is alive, evolving, negotiated and belongs to the present and to particular groups' (Edkins, 2003, p. 6).

The choice of materials was also significant in this work, which is common when creating art in natural environments, whether the selection is to do with sustainability, durability or symbolic reasons. In this case however, the materials were directly related to the spirit and history of the work:

the requirement for the toys was that they were used [secondhand], so that they had a certain pre-existing relationship with a child. So we get these toys from children who no longer use them, which were rejected, and we placed them in a levitating position in the forest, as some small markers and memories of the children's spirit.<sup>29</sup>

The result is a rather frightening and eerie encounter in the woods that fits artist and scholar Jill Bennett's (2012, p. 40) concept of aesthetics offering 'more than a record, a flashback or reconstruction ... (but) a means of inhabiting and simultaneously reconfiguring the historical event as a radically different experience.'

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<sup>29</sup> 'uslov za igračke je bio da su bile prije korištene, da su imale određenu relaciju s nekom djecom prije, pa smo dobili te igračke od djece koja ih ne bi više koristila koja su ih odbacila. i postavili smo ih u neki levitirajući položaj u šumi, kao neke male markere i sjećanja na taj dječiji duh.' Davor Paponja: artist and Ars Kozara participant 2013 and 2014. Translated extract from transcript of panel discussion on Ars Kozara at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka (19/09/2014)



Figure 5.8: *Part of Children of Kozara one year on (2015)*

In mid-2015, one year on, certain toys remained suspended whilst others had fallen or even disappeared (see figure 5.8 as an example). This ephemeral quality is fitting for both a Land Art project and the fate of the children of Kozara. Perhaps ephemerality is a good idea for memorials in general because if they are temporary, they cannot be distorted with time or absorbed into varying political narratives of historical events. This ephemeral quality is shared with the *Red Line Memorial*, which was a performance piece orchestrated by Haris Pasović in 2012 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the siege of Sarajevo. It involved the setting up of 11 541 red plastic chairs to represent those who died during the siege, which remained empty while a performance was acted onstage (Giovannucci, 2013). It lasted for one day only and as Giovanucci (2013, p. 449) comments:

Red plastic chairs seem so simple, but 11 541 of them can be overwhelming. A stage full of performers also seems ordinary, but the fact that they are playing to a dead audience is anything but that.

The simplicity and the temporary nature of the work meant that the memorial was open to all. It recognised collective victimhood and connected the citizens of East and West Sarajevo.<sup>30</sup> Paponja and Jović's work can be added to this attempt to demonstrate that 'society changes and thus the way society memorializes things should change,' by incorporating multiple media into modern memorials and temporary structures/demonstrations (Giovannucci, 2013, p. 451).

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<sup>30</sup> East Sarajevo is predominantly Serb, whereas West Sarajevo is mixed but mostly Bosniak

Continuing with this theme of open interpretations and different responses to the same kind of site, I will now discuss two works that engage with underground shelters built by partisans during the Second World War and reinforced by Tito: Nemanja Čađo's *Shelter for Future Generations*<sup>31</sup> (2012) and Sandy Ding's *Illuminated descent* (2015). These works also offer an opportunity to compare responses by a local and a foreign artist to the same kind of site.

In his *Shelter for Future Generations* (2012), local artist Nemanja Čađo contrasts the socialist history of protection and security offered by the Yugoslav state with the situation of precarity that has endured in Bosnia since the wars of the nineties. Simple white paint, pine cones and the slogan 'shelter for future generations' engage with both the past and the present. The work demonstrates concern and uncertainty for the future versus the relatively more secure past, contrasting a government that cared about its people versus one that only looks out for itself. When I first visited in 2014, two years after the installation of the work, there were barely any signs of this intervention but the shelter nevertheless remains. The ephemeral nature of the work demonstrates a point that the past, both positive and negative, on Kozara and in Bosnia, is often preserved better than the present.



Figures 5.9 and 5.10: *Shelter for Future Generations* (in 2012 – left, and 2014 - right), Nemanja Čađo, *Ars Kozara* (figure 5.9 courtesy of the artist)

The work of Chinese artist Sandy Ding on the other hand was a direct engagement with the internal space of another bunker that is also located at the main Glavuša site (like Nemanja's). Drawing on his background in experimental film and music, Ding treated the internal space of the bunker as a projection room, with light installations

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<sup>31</sup> *Sklonište za buduća pokolenja*

and special paint. This involved digging out the entrance and cleaning the bunker. These bunkers, although still physically sound, have not been maintained for human use in decades. The idea was to invert the idea of a screen, with the action happening around rather than on it. Though Ding discovered some of the history of the site and bunkers in Yugoslavia later, his inspiration came entirely from the environment and his own background, and was not altered in any way on learning the history. It was somewhat of a showpiece and given the massive renovation of the bunker, it will most likely remain to be engaged with by the public for years to come.

It is interesting to compare these two interactions with similar spaces. Ding's piece was entirely centred around the aesthetics of the space, whereas Čado's employed deeper contextual knowledge of its history. This highlights that overall, very little is known globally about Bosnia and Yugoslavia more broadly. However, I would argue that this form of ignorance could be turned into a positive. Currently the international community assumes that it knows everything about Bosnia, whereas artists such as Ding openly accept and work with their lack of knowledge. Artistic projects devoid of historical context can open up international engagements with Bosnia in different ways, and open up the spaces that they engage with.

Finally I will discuss a take on contemporary politics and society in Nikolina Butorac's work at the eighth edition of *Ars Kozara* (2015). Building on her past work on humorous tea recipes, she planted seeds that will eventually spell out 'trenutno'<sup>32</sup> and 'sada'<sup>33</sup>, along with varnished tree barks decorated with tea recipes. These recipes humorously play on problems in contemporary ex-Yugoslav societies, as is apparent from the titles: *Tea to be in the (present) moment*,<sup>34</sup> *Tea against corruption*,<sup>35</sup> and *Tea against indifference and inertia*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Currently

<sup>33</sup> Now

<sup>34</sup> *Čaj za biti u sadašnjem trenutku*

<sup>35</sup> *Čaj protiv korupcije*

<sup>36</sup> *Čaj protiv ravnodušnosti i inercije*





Figures 5.11 and 5.12: *Tea against indifference and inertia and Tea against corruption* (2015), Nina Butorac, Ars Kozara

The work is connected to contemporary politics but has nothing to do with ethnicity or recent wars. Corruption, indifference and inertia are certainly by-products of the political systems put in place following the breakup of Yugoslavia, but they are common to all ex-Yugoslav states (the artist herself is from Croatia). As analysts of politics have explained, these problems slow down the path to fully independent statehood, foreign investment and the general functioning of the state. Political analyses note that ‘rampant corruption and profiteering ... flourished during the war, creating criminal centres of power and influence’ (Dlouhy, 1999, p. 99) that remain today. Multiple regional and international probes demonstrate ‘fraud at the highest levels of government’ (Ajder, 2009, p. 2) yet despite being acknowledged as a problem by the international community, they have shied away from pushing the matter due to a desire to keep elites on their side and maintain peaceful associations (Divjak and Pugh, 2008). The international community and Dayton are therefore again partially blamed for the current situation, since ‘the complex administrative mechanics prescribed in the Dayton Accords presented opportunities for nationalist leaders to abuse public office’ (Divjak and Pugh, 2008, p. 373). This is because the process depoliticised and decentralised power, leading to confusion and creating vast space for loopholes and grey areas. Again, in the peace process, other political goals were prioritised above corruption and war profiteering. I have mostly discussed the Bosnian case here but the problems are regional. My specific attention to Bosnia is due to the fact that this is the overall focus of the thesis, but also because it has a reputation ‘as a “lawless political economy” in which wartime networks tuned into peacetime mafia business’ (Divjak and Pugh, 2008, p. 373).

As Butorac’s *Tea against indifference and inertia* (figure 5.11) demonstrates, however, a problem that goes in tandem with corruption is a general apathy amongst

the public towards this state of affairs. Everybody complains about it but it is accepted as the status quo that cannot be changed. The final recipe for *Tea for being in the moment* is not related specifically to ex-Yugoslav states, but global society more broadly. By adding a more universal theme, Butorac draws Kozara and the spaces of the former Yugoslavia into wider global problems, connecting them with broader artistic and geopolitical frameworks.

As my analysis has demonstrated, by including multiple themes, politics and realities, the artistic interventions of *Ars Kozara* add to, rather than detract from or hijack the exiting symbolism(s) of the mountain. They also demonstrate the ways that adding new contexts is in itself a powerful political statement, without that being the direct intention. Artists from different backgrounds with varied techniques are gathering together to create works on their own terms. A need to reconceptualise geographical notions of what 'Bosnian' art is can be seen in the works of *Ars Kozara*, even if this is not a direct intention. International perceptions largely follow Western narratives of Bosnia more broadly, and this has impacts on the production, reception and display of artists' work. Art in this context can therefore demonstrate an issue raised in Todorova's (2009) work: that Balkanist discourse has shaped Balkan identities. *Ars Kozara* demonstrates the ways that artists are moving beyond this. The inclusion of artistic practices in exploring the space of Kozara opens up meanings and also highlights the ways in which these sites have been manipulated over the decades to fit dominant regional narratives. Art hints at untruths and multiple realities without providing us with set opinions or answers. By engaging with space, rather than being overtly political, it pushes us to reconsider these questions on our own terms.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has engaged with the multiple narratives of a contested space, Kozara National Park, and the ways that artistic engagements can disrupt status quo interpretations of history and geographical context. By 'status quo', I refer to current regional interpretations of Kozara as a place and international perceptions of Bosnia more broadly. My argument is not that art should not deal with either of these geopolitical frameworks of interpretation, but rather that by exploring both the fragmented narratives of art and history, research can begin to normalise Bosnia as a



space and expand areas of academic engagement beyond the current dominant focus of war, ethnicity and nationalism.

As I have outlined in my literature review, some artists view it as their duty to engage overtly with political issues and this has been the most successful form of work internationally, leading to patterns of repetition and imitation. Not only does this keep Bosnia and its artists stuck within the narrow framework of recent history, it also undermines the work of artists whose engagement with this history comes from a place of sincerity rather than exploitation. Projects like *Ars Kozara* open out the means of expression and interpretation for regional artists by avoiding the traps of representation. It provides audiences with questions by interrupting expectations of Kozara, art and the relations between the two. This has creative implications for how we research places. Creative reworkings allow both the artist and viewer to question dominant narratives and their own perceptions.

The chapter also engaged with key themes of trauma and memory, and the ways in which who remembers and how is often controlled by top-level actors. Projects outside of official institutions, such as *Ars Kozara*, are shifting the dynamic to try to increase access and highlight more everyday encounters with place. The following chapter goes on to explore the links between art, politics and representation further by extending the analysis to a broader but related contested spaces, that of Republika Srpska. Combining historical and artistic approaches to different spaces demonstrates the lack of a singular account or truth, and that art is bound up in politics but might shift perceptions of Bosnia as a place to be one as multifaceted as any other society.

## **Chapter Six: Reappropriating space and identity in Republika Srpska**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will focus on the ways that young artists are reappropriating space and identity, specifically in Republika Srpska. I selected this region because it is an area that has been created as a separate entity with perhaps the largest push by local elites to create the image and history of an ethnically homogenised pseudo-state. Simultaneously, views from abroad have tended to dismiss or ignore the idea that any alternative opinions exist there. Academics have hinted that the situation on the ground is more complex than a study of local elites would suggest by illuminating the strategies of fragmentation implemented by the ethno-elite politicians that gained power and status through the Dayton agreement (Campbell, 1999; Jeffrey, 2013; Ó Tuathail and Dahlman, 2006; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). Some have even noted the ways that certain counter-processes, such as unexpected refugee returns (Belloni, 2005), have contradicted these strategies. However, despite active methodological engagements with these sites (Jeffrey, 2013; Toal and Dahlman, 2011), they have yet to shift the frames of analysis beyond top-down processes and actors.

My research therefore moves the literature on ethno-nationalism in Republika Srpska forward by engaging with local art practices that reappropriate spaces and symbols of belonging. I demonstrate that even in the more extreme sites of Bosnia, young artists and activists are doing work that attempts to create space for other interpretations of identity. I consider the focus of this section to be ‘reappropriation’ because in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly, the performance of a state (or entity) identity has included the misappropriation of symbols and events into newly ethnicised territories. Building on the concept of the Bosnian state identity as ‘performed’ or ‘improvised’ (Jeffrey, 2013), I will demonstrate the ways in which art can provide alternative performances, rather than simply deconstruct state actions. However, performance is not the only focus of the works I will discuss. At the core of each is a desire to identify out of dominant entity narratives. By analysing and making space for alternative geographies and identities, I show how art can disrupt certain status quo perceptions and perhaps open up questions or debates about legitimacy and statehood.

First, I provide more contextual background for Republika Srpska as an entity and the ways in which it has been constructed as a homogenous and separate space from the rest of Bosnia. I then consider art practices from the region that disrupt these constructions. I explore works by Tač.ka and Borjana Mrđa that play with tradition and ethnic symbols before moving to Banja Luka and the site of the art academy, which was formerly the Vrbas military barracks. My discussion includes both an examination of the site and Mladen Miljanović's engagement with it in his *I Serve Art* project (2006-7). Finally I explore Prijedor town and the annual (since 2013) *Prijedor Grad Murala* project.

### **Creating Republika Srpska**

Republika Srpska is one of the two entities that make up Bosnia and Herzegovina and is situated in the Northern and Eastern regions of the country. It does not have a continuous border due to the position of Brčko district in the North Eastern corner, something that has remained a contentious issue between politicians in the country (Jeffrey, 2013). Those in Republika Srpska would like a completely self-contained entity, whereas Federation politicians fear that this would strengthen claims and possibilities for the creation of an independent state, as well as threaten the rights of non-Serb citizens in this part of the country. Despite the gap in its border, Republika Srpska does not follow the canton system of the Federation but instead acts as a single unit with politics centralised out of Banja Luka, the entity's capital. Since Dayton established the entity system, politicians in Republika Srpska have tried extensively to create a unified mini-state with a capital to rival Sarajevo in order to strengthen claims for independence, or at least greater autonomy.

Currently Republika Srpska has its own government led by president Milorad Dodik, who since 2006 has been calling for a referendum on independence. As Toal (2013) outlines in his article on the rhetoric of Dodik in regards to this referendum, calls initially began when negotiations in April 2006 failed to give greater independence to Republika Srpska. They continued to reappear sporadically, usually at times when other states claimed independence, for example Kosovo and Montenegro (Toal, 2013). In September 2016 a new controversial referendum was held on whether or not to keep the entity's 9<sup>th</sup> January 'statehood day' holiday, which celebrates the symbolic founding of the Republika Srpska entity. This symbolic foundation refers to a

declaration in 1992 that, as regional commentators (Rose, 2016) note, ‘the country’s Bosniaks see as a precursor to the war that broke out soon afterwards.’ This celebration was ruled unconstitutional by the Bosnian state court, so the entity’s referendum on this decision to eliminate the holiday essentially determined whether or not to overturn a national ruling, thus undermining the political and legal frameworks outlined in Dayton and the foundation of state-level courts. The ruling of the national court was not that people cannot celebrate the day personally but rather that it should not be recognised as an official national holiday because a) Republika Srpska is not a nation and b) non-Serbs in the region would be further alienated. Undermining the state level court is not a surprising move for Dodik, who, as Jeffrey (2013, p. 134-135) notes, was very opposed to its establishment, most probably because he ‘is opposed to inquiries into his own role in embezzlement and fraud.’

Both the calls for a referendum on independence and the recent referendum to undermine state-level decisions are further demonstrations of the problems that continue at the political level in post-Dayton Bosnia. However, both Toal (2013) in his study of the rhetoric around the independence referendum and journalists (Kovacevic, 2016; Mujanovic, 2016) reporting on the current referendum believe that it is not simply a state-building move, but acts more as a diversionary tactic. In the case of independence, Toal (2013) notes that it is viewed as a crowd-pleaser, something that voters will understand as opposed to minute changes to laws and political structures, much like the European and US reliance on anti-immigration rhetoric, in which the majority of the population want a scapegoat for economic and social problems and would rather not think about the real complexities of the situation. In the case of the new referendum, regional commentators (Kovacevic, 2016; Mujanovic, 2016) believe it is to distract from the declining economic situation in the entity and Dodik’s loss of complete control of the political landscape.

The repeated calls for a referendum on Republika Srpska’s independence and attempts by Dodik and his supporters to undermine state-level processes highlight the desperation felt by ethno-nationalist politicians to solidify borders between entities. As outlined by scholar Somdeep Sen (2009, p. 523), this is due to the ‘porous’ nature of the current borders:

There are no territorial boundaries to entering or leaving [Republika Srpska] and this, in effect, creates the possibility of rendering the nation *impure* through the infusion of Croatian and *Bosniak* culture.

With a referendum on independence unlikely and the acceptance of any subsequent claims based on the outcome even less so, I will now outline some of the ways that the ethno-elite politicians of Republika Srpska have attempted to solidify borders that they currently cannot politically or legally alter. These include but are not limited to: language and more specifically the switch to an almost exclusive use of the Cyrillic (Serbian) alphabet (Sen, 2009), entity citizenship restrictions (Jeffrey, 2013), and investment in and establishment of ‘national’ institutions.

Sen (2009) focuses on the switch to near-exclusive use of the Cyrillic (Serbian) alphabet over Latin in his article on the ‘Cyrillization of Republika Srpska.’ This, along with religion, is the only obvious marker between Serb, Muslim and Croat residents. Religion was dealt with during the war through the destruction of Muslim people and spaces in the region. As outlined by political geography scholars such as Toal and Dahlman (2011) and Jeffrey (2013), the landscapes of Bosnia were altered to fit certain narratives and performances of ethnically homogenous enclaves. These processes were not limited to Republika Srpska but they were more pronounced and long lasting. However, through gradual increases in refugee returns and Mosque reconstructions in the entity, non-Serb cultural markers are creeping back in. This is something that undoubtedly threatens Dodik’s government’s ethno-nationalist hopes to seal off the borders between entities and cultures.

One element that has not altered so far is the switch to the near-exclusive use of the only other open cultural marker of a Serb entity: the Cyrillic alphabet. As Sen (2009) notes, this was not only due to it being something the government could legally do, but also to create a secular foundation of the mini-state and appeal to non-religious voters and politicians. Whilst the use of Cyrillic on signs and public documents does act as a symbolic marker of the difference between Republika Srpska and the Federation, it does not serve any mystifying purposes. Most people in the Federation know Cyrillic, especially those who were educated in Yugoslavia because it was taught in schools. As we progress through the postwar generations, it remains to be

seen how much of this knowledge will continue in the Federation however, given the mixed population and strategic benefits of knowing both, it seems unlikely that learning Cyrillic will die out. It is also important to note that despite the alphabet differences, the language in Republika Srpska is the same as Bosnian and Serbs from Serbia still identify the spoken language as Bosnian regardless of whether the person is from Republika Srpska or the Federation.<sup>37</sup> A friend from Prijedor who now lives in Novi Sad (Serbia) says that she is constantly identified somewhat negatively as Bosnian by her accent. Even if it is meant negatively, she is pleased to be identified as Bosnian, with Bosnian in this case being an inclusive label encompassing all entities and ethnicities, because she positively identifies as this. However, she finds it ironic that given the supposedly close relationship between the Serbs of Republika Srpska and Serbia, in the ‘motherland’ they are all Bosnian.<sup>38</sup> So despite attempts within the country to align with Serbia rather than Bosnia, and political closeness, everyday recognition outside of the country is not so defined.

Along with religion and language, Oberschall (2010, p. 18) includes ‘monuments, flags, street names, national holidays, festivals, museums, songs, literature and poetry, and history in schools’ as ‘visible markers’ in the creation of national identity. I have already discussed the issue of one national holiday and its role in undermining state-level processes. In terms of the other markers, I discussed monuments in the previous chapter and street names in my literature review. Here I want to discuss cultural markers and projects that attempt to compete with the state capital, Sarajevo.

Banja Luka, the capital of Republika Srpska, has a national theatre, a national library, a history museum, an ethnographic museum, and an archive, as well as an “international” airport that only has one scheduled flight route to and from Belgrade, operated by Air Serbia. Nothing in theory is wrong with the city trying to better itself and provide citizens with all of the mod cons of a contemporary metropolis, and many other cities in Bosnia have galleries, museums and airports. However, the main problem is the way that these are framed in national terms or in the framework of constructing Republika Srpska as having an individual history and culture as separate

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<sup>37</sup> Field notes from conversation with Biljana Banović: journalist and Tač.ka member (27/08/2016); plus observations from extended periods spent in Belgrade, Serbia (2015-). These periods were spent to solidify research using archive/regional sources, but also because my partner is Serbian

<sup>38</sup> Field notes from conversation with Biljana Banović: journalist and Tač.ka member (27/08/2016)

from that of the rest of the country. It also has its own contemporary art gallery, the full name of which is the Museum of Contemporary Art of Republika Srpska. Until recently, with a change of administration, the gallery had an almost exclusive focus on Serb artists (from both Republika Srpska and Serbia). During my first visit in February 2014, the temporary exhibition was an overview of contemporary artists from Republika Srpska and the text was entirely Cyrillic.

Limited patterns and frameworks for culture can be seen throughout Republika Srpska. Prijedor, for example, has the nickname ‘Town of Artists’ in Bosnia, due to a high concentration of historic regional artists coming from the municipality. This is used to promote tourism to the town, however access and acceptance is very dependent on how politically connected you are.<sup>39</sup> The small art gallery in Prijedor, Gallery ‘96, has consistently prohibited Tač.ka from exhibiting there because they are too politically controversial in terms of their critiques of cultural institutions and connections to local NGOs that go against the standard heteronormative Serb framework of the town.<sup>40</sup> During my fieldwork in Prijedor between February 2014 and September 2015, exhibitions included traditional arts and crafts, and non-political exhibitions of exclusively Serb artists. Up until recently, Tač.ka had also been blocked from municipality funding for similar political reasons, with it favouring groups such as a small, traditional art colony in the mountains. The story I was recounted was quite amusing, which is that sometimes the artists in this colony just take a painting they have already completed up to the mountain with them, get drunk and chat, and say that they created it during their residency: ‘but this fits the municipality conception of art.’<sup>41</sup> Tač.ka’s critique of the gallery’s exclusionary and rather nationalist policies, and my own observations of its exhibiting practices is supported by official UNDP data that reveals that the majority of cultural funding in the town goes towards projects with a Serb and/or traditional connection (UNDP 2004). So on the one hand you have ‘Prijedor: Town of Artists’, but you also have the subtext of ‘if you fit the municipal narrative.’

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Nemanja Čađo: Tač.ka member and coordinator (21/02/2014)

<sup>40</sup> Fieldnotes (19/02/2014)

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Nemanja Čađo: Tač.ka member and coordinator (21/02/2014)

Several recent changes seem to be opening up some of these avenues. For example, the change of administration of the Museum of Contemporary Art in 2015 has seen an opening up of the exhibitions, such as a show of Croatian contemporary art in September 2015. Tač.ka also received funding from the Republika Srpska Ministry of Culture in 2015, though I will discuss the problems associated with this in later chapters. The start of this interest in culture can perhaps be traced back to the 2013 Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Venice Biennale. Despite high levels of corruption in Republika Srpska, economic and employment problems, and an increasingly declining population (Vranješ and Petković, 2014), the entity was somehow able to support its part of the Venice Biennale plan for Bosnia. 2013 was the first time in a decade that the country had been represented at the festival and only the second time that the country was represented as an independent state. This was due to disagreement over how representation would be organised, with neither the Federation nor Republika Srpska willing to concede or compromise on control.

In 2011 it was agreed that representation would be split, alternating between Republika Srpska and Federation organisation. In 2013, the organisers in Republika Srpska put together a very professional pavilion and supporting materials, with Mladen Miljanović as the representative. In 2015, struck by financial chaos and minimal support from the government,<sup>42</sup> the Federation was unable to organise a pavilion. It has been suggested by some<sup>43</sup> that Dodik was keen to support the pavilion in order to present Republika Srpska as a functioning, unified entity as opposed to the Federation, thus further supporting calls for its independence. Here we see how art becomes tied up with state building. This is not to say that the pavilion itself was in any way politically aligned with Dodik's project, far from it, or to say that they should not have gone ahead with it. It is simply an illustration of the funding logic behind an economically corrupt and failing entity investing decent sums of money towards the organisation of an international art event. With the failure of Sarajevo's turn to organise in 2015, Dodik had one more thing to show that his entity is more structurally sound than the rest of the country and therefore damaged by its connection to a structurally failing entity, even if most of this is appearance rather than reality.

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Maja Abdamerović: head curator of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (14/08/2014)

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Jon Blackwood: art historian, curator and editor of the Sarajevo Culture Bureau (20/06/2014)



The interest in Tač.ka's *Ars Kozara* project could be due to its growing reputation from 2013 onwards but as the failure to actually commit the funds promised for the 2015 edition demonstrates, Republika Srpska cannot keep up investments in its image or cultural race with the Federation. It is therefore a shallow and problematic engagement with culture to once again incorporate culture into its mini-state project, even if elements of this culture are contradictory to the image of Republika Srpska.

Now that I have outlined the political manipulation of cultural markers to create Republika Srpska as a mini-state, the following section will explore how artistic engagements with some of these signs and spaces disrupt or reclaim them in more neutral terms. Because along with the politicisation of a Serb identity within Bosnia has come the somewhat negative association of said identity as being in alignment with ethno-nationalist politics in the region. It is important that Serb identity becomes more open and ceases to be automatically linked to violent histories and negative perceptions. This could further isolate the population and strengthen political claims for independent statehood. Equally important is that some of the shared history that has been distorted into a Republika Srpska history returns to a more collective framework. As I will now demonstrate, artists in the entity are working through these issues in interesting ways.

### **Artistic (re)imaginings**

The problems of trying to entrench cultural differences to strengthen ethnoterritorial claims are not only limited to questions of borders and politics, but also identity for both Serb and non-Serb citizens of Republika Sprksa and Bosnia more broadly. The more ethno-nationalist politicians utilise cultural markers to define a territory as 'Serb', the more the cultural markers of being Serb become pronounced and associated with negative aggressor qualities. Equally, non-Serb citizens of the entity become increasingly disenfranchised and framed as Other internally, and as victim externally. This is something that the anthropologist Sivac-Bryant (2016, p. 2) has referred to as the 'tyranny of labelling'. She explores it more from the side of the Muslim victims of Kozarac and the ways that this label has denied agency and slowed progress in the returns process. However, she acknowledges the unhelpful labelling of Serbs as aggressors too, which is the focus of this section. Through an examination of several art practices, I demonstrate how artists are engaging with the cultural markers

co-opted by ethno-nationalist politicians in Republika Srpska as well as some of the controversial spaces that have shaped these efforts, in order to reimagine identity and space in controversial contexts.

Tač.ka's *Kozaračko Kolo* mural from *Ars Kozara* 2013 plays with the cultural markers of traditional dance and the motifs that accompany it, which have been absorbed into negative, nationalist discourses and divorced from any positive or neutral history. The mural in Kozara National Park was designed and executed by several artists from across Bosnia and the concept is twofold: to rehabilitate Kozara as a place, as well as rehabilitating exploited traditional motifs. The mural is equal parts a rejection of the political misappropriation of history and space, and a desire to demystify these processes, drawing on a culture and history that is open to all and free from political restraints.



*Figure 6.1: Kozaračko Kolo (2013), Ars Kozara (photo taken 20 June 2014)*

The mural is based on the main dance from the region, *Kozaračko Kolo*, which became a popular socialist dance. Kolos are traditional dances from around the former Yugoslavia and predate the Second World War and the Partisans but also have variants in all of the Republics, therefore not limited to Serb culture. Having said this, each ethnicity would have a specific style of dance and dress that would outwardly identify their origin, for example the šajačka hats of Serb traditional dress (Baković, 2015). Kozaračko Kolo was danced around the space where the monument now stands by people from the surrounding towns and villages following the Partisan victory in the Second World War as a celebration and commemoration of the struggle. The dance therefore has a more inclusive, community history, or at least one that does not fit the ethnicised, Serb-only quality it is attributed today. It predates the Second World War and the partisan era but following the establishment of Yugoslavia, accompanying lyrics commemorating or incorporating the partisans were written:

Hey, Kozara,  
My dense forest

Within you  
Many partisans

How many there are  
In the branches of Kozara

Yet still many more  
Young partisans

How many there are  
In the leaves of Kozara

Yet still many more  
Young communists<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Oj Kozaro,  
moja gusta šumo,  
U tebi je,  
partizana puno  
Koliko je,  
na Kozari grana  
Još je više,  
mladih partizana  
Koliko je,  
na Kozari lista  
Još je više,  
mladih komunista

The dance was therefore built into a socialist history and the making of the Yugoslav state. To dress or dance traditionally was not always viewed positively and remains problematic today. As Baković (2015, p. 356) discusses in her paper on the use of culture to maintain connections between the diaspora and Yugoslavia, although traditional dance and music groups were sent on tours to key diaspora hubs, there were attempts to try to introduce what the urban state representatives viewed as ‘more “refined” and “enlightened” cultural content.’ This is because it was associated with more rural and therefore, perceived to be, less educated populations (Baković, 2015). Additionally, some songs and symbols (in terms of dress) were banned during Yugoslavia for being too Serb or Croat, which were ‘seen as more dangerous [to Yugoslav brotherhood and unity] than those of smaller nations’ (Baković, 2015, p. 368). Again, the šajačka hat was included in this ban. Kozaračko Kolo was, however, a strong socialist symbol tied up with Kozara, the famous antifascist struggle and the new lyrics commemorating this. Now this is forgotten and it remains in the same framework of all traditional dances from the region, tied up with individual ethnicities.

The Kozaračko Kolo dance is in many ways another example of the shifting forms of manipulation of the symbols of Kozara throughout history. In this case it was simply manipulated out of a more unified narrative that is not constructive to current strategies of division pursued by ethno-nationalist politicians in the region. By reclaiming and updating the imagery attached to the dance, Tač.ka’s work aims to highlight the collective history and in a sense, because of the location, they return it literally to the physical space from which it originated: Kozara mountain. They use the familiar patterns and symbols found on the traditional dress worn during the dance but disconnect them from the dress of the figures (see figures 6.2 and 6.3). The people are faceless silhouettes, so identification with any particular group is not possible. This openness reflects the complexity of the history of the dance and the space of Kozara. It is Serb, it is Yugoslav, it is Bosnian. If state identity is performed through different means, including symbols, songs and dances; Tač.ka’s mural acts as an alternative performance of Kozaračko Kolo that reappropriates certain symbols and elements of a shared tradition.



Figures 6.2 and 6.3: Sections of the Kozaračko Kolo mural, depicting the broken down imagery and ethnic symbols

Borjana Mrđa's video work *I don't remember... so I could tell you* (2013), demonstrates a positive personal reconnection with tradition, which is too often mobilised to isolate and divide people. The work depicts the artist's family home and three generations of Mrđa women wearing traditional costumes (made by and passed down through the family). The sound accompanying the images is of woodcutting. In a discussion with me at her home studio, Borjana talked about the five hundred year-old forests that her ancestors took care of and did not jeopardise or destroy in any way, regardless of financial circumstances. However, now the new generations are cutting it down to build houses and so on. As she sees it, 'in a sense we've kept negative elements of tradition and forgotten the nurturing side.'<sup>45</sup> This highlights the hypocrisy of ethno-nationalist constructions, since they promote tradition in ways that suit their agenda and discard or allow deviances from tradition that are sometimes harmful.

Borjana is in no way traditional herself and the work was the first time she had ever worn the traditional dress. The work is neither a straightforward celebration nor rejection of tradition. It is more a presentation of imagery divorced from the now-common context for ethno-traditions of celebrating some form of Serbdom. As with

<sup>45</sup> Field notes from visit to artist Borjana Mrđa's studio (09/07/2014)



Tač.ka's *Kozaračko Kolo* work, by performing tradition in such a jarring and decontextualised manner, Mrđa questions how these traditions and symbols are mobilised and viewed. The work also highlights how the means of accessing tradition, which are currently very narrow, might be opened up. Traditional dress and customs are shunned by those not aligned with hardline ethno-nationalist politics. The main critique of Mrđa's work is that ethno-nationalist politics takes only what it wants from tradition however, the work can also be seen as a way to divorce even those parts of tradition from such discourses.



Figures 6.4 and 6.5: Stills from *I don't remember... so I could tell you* (2013), Borjana Mrđa (courtesy of artist)

My next examples move from symbols to spaces, first exploring works that engage with the site of the Banja Luka Art Academy. The Academy is located in what was, during the war of 92-95, the Vrbas military barracks. Established in 1998, the transformation from barracks to art academy was described by Borjana Mrđa, echoing the views of many, as 'one of the only good things the government has done and really a positive change.'<sup>46</sup> A cynical view could see it as one of president Dodik's attempts to out-do the Federation, as he often invests in projects that present Republika Srpska as a unified, thriving, cultural centre in an attempt to strengthen claims for further independence or separation.<sup>47</sup> The truth is probably somewhere in between the two opinions although admittedly, those of the former opinion are not necessarily acknowledging any good will on the part of the government. It is simply a happy coincidence. The photos below illustrate the experience of walking around

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Borjana Mrđa: artist and professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy (17/06/2014)

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Jon Blackwood: art historian, curator and editor of the Sarajevo Culture Bureau (20/06/2014)

the grounds of the Academy now (figures 6.6 and 6.7). There are hardly any traces of the past army base, which was one of the headquarters of the fight to establish the “Serb” entity. Now it is a peaceful, green area in the middle of the city, favoured by Banja Luka’s more left wing students. This is consistent with the image of Banja Luka as a place that ‘appears totally normal and functional on the surface.’<sup>48</sup> However, underneath the ordered and clean aesthetic exist the same financial and social problems as in the rest of Bosnia.



*Figure 6.6: Banja Luka University and Art Academy, May 3 2015*



*Figure 6.7: Banja Luka University and Art Academy, May 3 2015*

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Jon Blackwood: art historian, curator and editor of the Sarajevo Culture Bureau (20/06/2014)

Artist Mladen Miljanović, who represented Bosnia at the 2013 Venice Biennale, engaged with the art academy space in his 2006-7 work *I Serve Art*. It combines his experience of the space in both artistic and military contexts. In doing so, he is performing his own identity and connection to the space.

Miljanović did army service training at the Vrbas barracks and then went on to study at the art academy, where he is now a professor. *I Serve Art* consists of photo documentation of performances conducted by the artist in the space, which involved nine months living and working in isolation. In an interview with the (now) director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Banja Luka, Sarita Vujkovic, Miljanović described the work as 'an allusion to the conditions of national service', as well as the isolation of the self and Bosnia (Vujkovic, 2008).



Figure 6.8: *I Serve Art* (2006-7), Mladen Miljanović, photo courtesy of artist

The project also produced *Sit-no* (2007), a series of works he did during his nine-month isolation as a sort of daily countdown diary to the end of his self-imposed imprisonment. This mirrors the actions of those on national military service, who often count down the days until the end of their call of duty, which for many in Yugoslavia on the cusp of war was compulsory.

Like Mrđa's take on tradition, Miljanović's work does not confront his past in a way that erases the negative aspects or glorifies the military. It is simply a way of confronting the two lives of the space and his career. By approaching the work this way, Miljanović avoids being absorbed into narratives that portray his history and identity as good or bad. History is just there to be confronted and interpreted in whatever way the audience wants.



Miljanović's work more broadly often deals with deconstructing or, to use his word, 'decontaminating' (Miljanović, 2008a; Vujkovic, 2008) space and symbols. For example the mixed-media work *Attack* (2007) emulates military strategy maps in the form of an art assault on the west by Bosnia. As he describes:

On the canvases are the plans of the galleries, whose maps I received by corresponding and presenting myself as an organisation for promoting culture from Netherlands. Gaining maps of certain galleries, I paint a plan for installing work in the space using military symbols and expressions and at the end of process I get in touch with the galleries again and ask for an exhibition, threatening them with "art terrorism!" (Miljanović, 2008b)

Here Miljanović is deconstructing Western attitudes of Bosnia as liminal and thus its exclusion in the art world outside of special thematic exhibitions. At the same time he installs an imagined or virtual exhibition across major gallery spaces in the Western art world. The work also applies a strategy of overidentification with stereotypes of his position as both a Serb and an ex-military man. Something that has been referred to as an 'artistic-military strategy' (Riding, 2016; Vujkovic, 2008).

James Riding (Riding, 2016) approaches some of these works in a paper that positions Miljanović's work as representative of Bosnia. My interest is not to explore the difficulties of broader regional representation in Miljanović's work, but rather to consider how they work to reappropriate space and identity. A strength of all of the works that I have discussed, for me, is that they are not obviously about Bosnia. Of course, they are direct interventions with the spaces and experiences of his past. However the imagery and composition is such that it could be about any militarised society and/or societies excluded from the Western imagination. This effectively 'decontaminates' the space by incorporating Bosnia into global structures. Miljanović favours little explanation to accompany his works.<sup>49</sup> But I would argue that, like the works of *Ars Kozara*, these works are not didactic or directly political, but prompt a questioning of everyday rituals, sites and symbols.

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<sup>49</sup> Field notes from meeting with Mladen Miljanović: artist, professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy and Bosnian Pavilion representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale (18/02/2014)

Picking up on the idea of ‘decontaminating space’, I move 50km from Banja Luka to Prijedor town. It is a small town in a municipality with a controversial history, as I have discussed in my literature review and the previous chapter on Kozara National Park. The town is rather humorously referred to as ‘Town of Artists’, due to the large number of Bosnian artists who have come from there. The first academic artist from Bosnia, Todor Švrakić, was from Prijedor, as well as the sculptor and brother of Partisan war hero Mladen Stojanović, Sreten Stojanović, who represented Yugoslavia at the Venice Biennale in 1950 and is recognised as one of the most important Yugoslav sculptors.<sup>50</sup> Even today, for a small town, there are an unusually large number of artists and creative people. However government attention is reasonably shallow. According to artist and activist Emir Hodžić from Prijedor:

Culture is still seen as purely promotional material for political purposes, unfortunately. I would even say that it promotes backwardness ... the words culture, cultural engagement, cultural centre are in the hands of those who lead them. Connections are only to further their own positions. And therefore they call themselves elites. In many of my observations of artistic events, cultural events are like a carnival ... [and] we have these same self-appointed elites who gather at public events. You fuck these events when you have [these] people present, these self-proclaimed elites who support nationalism and fascist ideas. In doing so, any critique of that is marginalised and seen as unnecessary.<sup>51</sup>

Projects such as *Prijedor Grad Murala*<sup>52</sup> attempt to navigate this problem and create deeper engagements with the town culturally. Following the trend for street art in towns and cities around the world, the local NGOs Progetto Prijedor and the local

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<sup>50</sup> Field notes from visit to the Mladen Stojanović cultural house, Prijedor (21/02/2014)

<sup>51</sup> ‘Još uvijek se gleda na kulturu kao isključivo promotivni materijal za političke svrhe nažalost. Ja Bosna čak rekao da se promoviše krkanluk malo više ... riječ kultura, kulturni angažman, kulturni centri su u rukama ljudi koji ih vode, odnosno oni su sami sebi dali te pozicije. I samim time sebe su nazvali elitama. U mnoge po nekoj mojoj observaciji umjetničke manifestacije, kulturne manifestacije su poput karnevala ... [i] imamo te iste samoprovane elite koje se okupljaju po javnim manifestacijama. Jebeš ti takvu manifestaciju gdje imaš ljude, samoprovane elite koje podržavaju nacinalizam i fašističke ideje. Pri tome bilo kakva kritika toga, bilo kakva, opet se vraćam na ono što nas tišti, je višena kao i marginalizovana kao nepotrebna.’ Emir Hodžić: artist and activist. Translated extract from transcript of guerilla panel discussion/action *Noć Muzeja* (18/05/2015)

<sup>52</sup> Prijedor City of Murals

Association of Visual Artists<sup>53</sup> initiated annual (since 2013) mural paintings in the town. Progetto Prijedor is a local NGO connecting Prijedor with the Italian province of Trentino and the official name of the project is the *Paulo de Manincor Prize*. It is an international open call that invites one selected applicant to create a mural on a different wall in the town each year. The locations of the murals are agreed in advance with local businesses. The first was designed and created by Nataša Konjević (Banja Luka), 2014's successful entry was Hungarian Vidam (Attila Szamosi), and 2015 was Romanian Saddo Raul (see figures 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11). The idea behind the mural project was twofold: firstly, to acknowledge the artistic history of the town and secondly, as a reminder of the links between Prijedor and the Italian province of Trentino, which I will now discuss further.



Figures 6.9 and 6.10: *Prijedor Grad Murala work, Nataša Konjević, 2013*

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<sup>53</sup> Udruženje Likovnih Umetnika



Figure 6.11: *Prijedor Grad Murala* work, *Vidam*

Although I agree with Emir's point on the problem of cultural events being absorbed into elite narratives, I do not believe that this can be avoided by artists and would argue that the approach of something like *Prijedor Grad Murala* is a good way to navigate the issue. Again the question of whitewashing is relevant. It is certainly the case that the town and municipality support the project (symbolically) and that officials make appearances on completion each year. And this is indeed a shallow engagement with culture on their part and perhaps an attempt at self-promotion rather than project promotion. However, *Prijedor Grad Murala* does not itself engage with or advertise any political connection. It was started entirely on the initiative of Progetto Prijedor and local artists, and funded by the NGO itself, which is financed by the province of Trentino in Italy. Paulo de Manincor was an artist from Trentino, who in 1998 created the first mural in Prijedor by the electro-technical school. So the project was partly a memorial to him and the history of the town when it was a more unified and diverse society,<sup>54</sup> and this legacy and reference point is not easily circumvented by local elites.

This highlights the complexity of both the context and artistic politics. Art is always tied up in politics and there is no way to avoid this. This entanglement does not necessarily always work in favour of the politicians but it is also naïve to believe that it is possible to escape the situation simply by being critical of political actors. I would

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Sladjana Miljević: head of the Progetto Prijedor NGO (17/06/2014)

suggest that not engaging with political actors, discourses and practices at all still acts as a rejection of sorts, and would argue that *Prijedor Grad Murala* functions in this way. It is a project aimed at regenerating the city and exposing people to art. Working as an NGO since 1998, the people of Progetto Prijedor are entirely aware of and engaged with the politics of the municipality more broadly, but this project is aimed at specific on-the-ground problems of culture and education. Rather than a wide-ranging critique of the politics of culture in Prijedor that would run the risk of being self-defeating, it works to achieve more limited but meaningful ends within a complex political situation.

This section has explored the ways in which certain artistic approaches can go beyond critiquing states, entities and borders, by creating space for other interpretations of identity. In Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly, claims to history and space are multiple and especially contradictory. In the fight for legitimacy, artistic interpretations of alternative spaces and identities can allow both artists and spectators to step outside of dominant political narratives. By moving my research beyond formal actors and processes, I have built on feminist and subaltern critiques of critical geopolitics and engaged with the agency of those affected by ethno-nationalist strategies of fragmentation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored a particularly controversial area of Bosnia, Republika Srpska, and the ways that art practices have engaged with and reworked its geographies, politics and identities. In order to move the political geography literature away from popular themes of fragmentation and ethnic tension, I chose to focus on projects that broaden access to spaces and identities in Bosnia. This is not to negate the processes of division that are taking place in Republika Sprska, but rather to demonstrate how artists can disrupt dominant narratives and remap the borders and definitions of contested contexts.

Building on the previous chapter's engagement with questions surrounding the multiple narratives of contested spaces, this chapter goes further to highlight the entanglement of art and politics; and the ways that challenges to politics from a knowledge of situatedness within it may be more effective than naïve beliefs that it is

possible to work outside politics. The question is what impact art has as part of, rather than a comment on, these structures. If art is inherently part of the politics it critiques or parodies then as Rancière (2010, p. 145) states, it ‘must become more modest ... (not profess) to be able to reveal the hidden contradictions of our world.’ Approaches to art that follow this logic allow it more agency because they assume that ‘art affects this reality precisely because it is entangled into all of its aspects’ (Steyerl 2014, 5), not simply because it makes a statement about reality.

Whilst existing studies on the organisation of territory in the region have been essential in illuminating the constructed nature of ethnic identities and spaces (see for example Toal and Dahlman, 2011), their deconstruction of violence and competing nationalisms in Bosnia simply reinforces the framings of division. Through my exploration of art practices in one of the more extreme sites of fragmentation and ethno-nationalist politics, I have highlighted alternative ways in which this can be analysed, which I will explore further in subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter Seven: The antipolitics of humour in contemporary Bosnian art practices**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will expand my examined sites beyond Republika Srpska to Bosnia more broadly. It also shifts the focus away from artistic engagements with specific spaces, to the broader theoretical questions for regional and international art worlds. Considering further the issue of competing approaches to art in post-conflict societies, I explore the position of humour in contemporary Bosnian art practices and its antipolitical nature. Both the efficacy and appropriateness of humour in contemporary art have been questioned, but its prevalence and history in Bosnia cannot be ignored. In order to further understand Bosnia as a place, it is necessary to appreciate the role of humour in society, and in particular the ways that it has been used as a weapon of sorts to combat standard narratives of war and victimhood. If scholars such as Todorova (2009) and Goldsworthy (2013) have highlighted the ways in which culture has been used to entrench Balkan stereotypes, the aim here is to demonstrate how humour functions as a cultural strategy to reappropriate and reject these stereotypes. As a strategy, it is closely tied in with art historian Klara Kemp-Welch's (2013) concept of antipolitics because in using practices such as over-identification and ridicule, artists are refusing to be aligned with simplified narratives of the region.

Building on the work of art critic Peter Schjeldah, I will also explore the relationship between humour and place. In his analysis of the role of laughter in Ed Ruscha's art and its relation to Los Angeles, Schjeldah states that 'in Los Angeles, one laughs to survive, enjoys oneself not to enhance life but to live at all' (Schjeldah, 2007, p. 73). Schjeldah (2007) argues that if you want to know Los Angeles, you can learn a lot more from Ruscha's art than a guidebook or media representations because he captures this essence of laughter and survival. Bosnia is not Los Angeles but humour could be seen in the same way, even if I do not like this term 'survival'. It implies a coping mechanism that to some extent is true but the use of humour is not so simplistic. Humour in Bosnia contributes further to the literature on fragmentation, as it demonstrates continuation with Yugoslav behavioral patterns and also acts as a bonding tool between people thought to be separated by war, as well as a way to subvert common international perceptions of Bosnia.

However, just as humour can provide greater knowledge of a place, it can also be untranslatable. Drawing on my experiences at *Ars Kozara* 2015, I will demonstrate the advantages and limitations of using humour to contribute to the study of Bosnia as a place. The 2015 edition of *Ars Kozara* included foreign artists and it was through my role as translator that the question of translatability arose. As a translator I realised that it was not only the language but also the context that needed to be translated and even then, it was not necessarily always funny. Exploring the geography of humour involves two elements: acknowledging that humour is contextually-driven and therefore another element in the fabric of society to be explored for a deeper understanding of place; but at the same time, that it can be so regionally-specific that this knowledge is hard to grasp. I therefore explore the geographies of humour in Bosnia through art practices in order to demonstrate how it can be both illuminating and non-transferrable.

I will first consider the role of humour in Yugoslav society in order to set the context of its prevalence and forms. I then move on to discuss humour and antipolitics in contemporary Bosnian art practices, using examples to explore three main themes: 1) ridicule 2) over-identification with certain stereotypes and 3) humorous engagement with the processes of inventing histories and traditions. My key case studies here will be: Damir Nikšić (Sarajevo), Igor Bošnjak (Trebinje), Tač.ka (Prijedor), Selma Selman (Bihać/Banja Luka), the monument to the IC (Sarajevo), and the Bruce Lee monument (Mostar).

### **Humour in Yugoslavia**

In order to examine the uses of humour in art practices, it is first necessary to understand the historical role of humour in Yugoslavia. Building on art critic Jennifer Higgie's (2007, p. 12) critique that 'humour has not been considered a subject worthy of consideration', I demonstrate the ways in which it can shed light on aspects of life, and its social and contextual significance. Higgie (2007) is referring to the art world – critics and curators – but this could be extended to academic studies, which have only recently begun to explore humour from geographical perspectives (Dittmer, 2013a; Dodds and Kirby, 2013; Kuus, 2008; Purcell et al., 2009; Ridanpää, 2014b). Always a key feature in Yugoslav societies, and even more so in dark times, humour has acted



as a form of bonding and resistance amongst citizens. Building on the geopolitical literature on humour (Dittmer, 2013a; Dodds and Kirby, 2013; Kuus, 2008; Purcell et al., 2009; Ridanpää, 2014b), I demonstrate that the dismissal of humour in art practices by scholars such as Rancière (2010) limits perceptions of the relationship between humour, art and politics. My research also expands the literature on humour in art practices (Higgie, 2007; Schjeldah, 2007) more broadly to include a study of humour and art in controversial contexts.

During the existence of Yugoslavia, popular culture was rich in comedy. The television shows, films and jokes from this time continued to be popular throughout the breakup, and their legacy remains today. Across class, ethnicity, gender and age, a large number of citizens know the scripts by heart, and famous lines litter daily conversations. As outlined by Carty and Musharbash (2008) in their study of the significance of humour in anthropological studies more broadly, in the case of the former Yugoslavia specifically, humour remains a form of bonding and a way to see what kind of ‘ex-Yugoslav’ you are.

Often self-deprecating and very dark, the peoples of the former Yugoslavia learned to laugh at themselves and other people’s perceptions of them. One of the most popular television shows in the eighties and early nineties was the Sarajevo-based sketchshow *Top Lista Nadrealista* (The Surrealists’ Top Chart), created and filmed in Bosnia. It mocked everyone from the villages to the UN, and one particular sketch involving the UN is extremely significant for its premonitions of things to come. Filmed before the outbreak of war in 1992, the sketch shows three men playing pool – a Muslim, a Serb and a Croat. Then the UN representatives enter and start to stir up trouble by telling each of the players what the other players are “saying” about them, until the three ‘nationalities’ end up fighting over the pool table. It demonstrates not only a longstanding critique of the ways in which the UN and international community conduct their business in the region, but also premonitions of what was to come.<sup>55</sup> This links back to Kuus’ (2008) exploration of subversive obedience in the novel *The Good Soldier Švejk* and its connection to contemporary Estonian attitudes to NATO. Just as the subtle humour of over-identification in *Švejk* undermines the political system it critiques by highlighting its stupidity, that is reflected in her study of

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<sup>55</sup> ‘Episode 2’, Season 3 (1991), *Top Lista Nadrealista*, TV Sarajevo

contemporary Estonian attitudes towards NATO membership; the humour in the *Top Lista Nadrealista* sketch demonstrates the ways that Bosnian society is aware of the manipulative techniques of international forces such as the UN, even if it outwardly seems to have fallen for the trick.

Many of the issues that exist in contemporary ex-Yugoslav society were predicted or outlined in *Top Lista Nadrealista*. For example, one episode deals with the question of language, even before the breakup.<sup>56</sup> In the sketch, a linguistic expert comes on the news to talk about the “different” languages of Yugoslavia. He cites an excessively long list, including ‘crnski’ and ‘gorski’. ‘Crna Gora’ is the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian name for Montenegro. There is no direct way to translate this joke but it is effectively making fun of people who stress the differences of their language by inventing both a ‘Monte’ and ‘Negrian’ language. At the time, it was common amongst citizens of the various republics (especially Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia) to joke about the “different” languages because even during the Yugoslav period, there were arguments about language, especially in Croatia (Lampe, 2000; Malcolm, 1996; Rusinow, 1977). The official language during Yugoslavia was Serbo-Croatian but regional variants always existed. Slovenian, Macedonian and Albanian are completely different languages and therefore will not be discussed.

The main differences between Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin languages are alphabet and dialect. Serbian and Montenegrin use the Cyrillic alphabet, whereas Croatia and Bosnia use the Latin however, especially during Yugoslavia, most people would learn both. In terms of dialects, there are many sub-dialects and minority languages, but the main three are ekavian, ijekavian and ikavian. Ekavian is the Serbian dialect; Bosnia, Montenegro and most of Croatia use ijekavian; and the Dalmatian region of Croatia speaks ikavian. The difference is in spelling, which affects the pronunciation, and I will use the example of the word for milk to demonstrate:

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Episode 4’, Season 3 (1991), *Top Lista Nadrealista*, TV Sarajevo

Ekavian	Mleko
Ijekavian	Mlijeko
Ikavian	Mliko

*Figure 7.1: Example of dialect differences*

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia there has been active intervention by language planners to ensure that each of the languages ‘gain legitimacy as full-fledged standard languages, not a “BCS” [Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian]’ (Greenberg, 2004, p. 57). In Croatia this can be seen in the introduction of new words to replace the formerly shared words, and in Republika Srpska, attempts to create linguistic borders can be seen in the ‘Cyrillization’ of the entity (Sen, 2009). The question of how to identify the languages of the former Yugoslavia is complicated, and linked to nation-forming and power struggles. However, the main point to highlight is that they are mutually comprehensible without any trouble. Another joke today is that the citizens of the former Yugoslavia became multilingual overnight and I myself have had people in the UK be impressed by the fact that I am learning “all three languages”. The skill of the *Top Lista Nadrealista* sketch then is that it reflected popular humour of the time and held prophetic visions of the future where, at least in name, the languages have divided into “distinct” regional mother tongues.

The prevalence and forms of humour continued during the war and beyond, which often raises questions of how it is possible to laugh in the face of such tragedy. Before the outbreak of war, ethno-nationalist forces began to stir up trouble by inciting violence with violence. One such example was a shooting at a wedding in Sarajevo, following which:

barricades – first Serbian, then Muslim – sprang up in Sarajevo. Yet the people guarding the barricades were still quite reluctant to engage in any real confrontation. Many pulled stockings over their heads to hide their identity from one another, believing the tension could not last. A mere couple of days later, the barricades came down. A joke went around Sarajevo: “You look better without the stocking, trust me” ... A song called “stocking on your face” was sung for weeks afterwards (Udovički and Štikovac, 1997, p. 182).

This humour continued throughout the war and following. One camp survivor at Omarska joked that he highly recommended the ‘Karadžić diet’ (Moll, 2012, p. 193).<sup>57</sup> Radovan Karadžić was the leader of the Serb paramilitary units in Bosnia so the joke here is that he was in charge of the camps, therefore the weight loss caused by starvation was indirectly his “diet regime”. Similarly, screenwriter and film critic Andrew Horton (2002, p. 24) discusses the irony of repeated screenings of Slobodan Sijan’s dark comedy *Who is singing over there (Ko to tamo peva)* (1980) during the NATO bomb attacks in Belgrade. The film takes place on a bus journey to Belgrade during the Second World War, comprised of many different comical stereotypes from the former Yugoslavia. It ends as they arrive in Belgrade and the German bomb strikes start, killing everyone on the bus. People took comfort in this irony and many describe that period in Belgrade as a really fun and freeing time, with many parties and gatherings occurring around the city’s abandoned buildings. Similarly in Bosnia, whilst not fun in any way, people had hopes that the war could at least end positively. Unfortunately it ended in ethno-political elites and fragmentation. Now they just feel stuck.<sup>58</sup>

A positive attitude towards such extreme conditions is yet another dark joke, albeit with much truth, in the sense that in chaos there was freedom and a sense of togetherness. People were partying and freed from the responsibilities of “normal” life because they did not know how long that life would last or what would happen to their country. Combined with mass anti-Milošević protests, there was a sense that the Yugoslav wars would end, corrupt politicians would be removed, and real political change could happen. Under bombing, sanctions and hyperinflation, Serbians used humour as a bonding and resistance tool. Under siege, extermination and war, Bosnians did the same. An example of similarities in experience can be seen in graffiti practices in Belgrade, and poster design and distribution in Sarajevo. In her study of humour and non-violent struggle in Serbia, Sombatpoonsiri (2015) notes the use of humorous aphorisms graffitied across Serbia as anti-establishment messages and

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<sup>57</sup> ‘I weighed 80kg before I entered the camp, I weighed 48kg when I left – for losing weight, I would recommend to everyone the Radovan Karadžić diet.’ (Je pesais 80kg avant d’entrer au camp, j’en pesais 48Kg quand j’en suis sorti – pour perdre du poids, je recommande à tous le régime Radovan Karadžić.)

<sup>58</sup> Notes from meeting with Selma (anonymised): LGBTQ activist, Sarajevo (25/05/2015)

morale-boosters. These were used as a means of alternative communication and statements of opposition following the breakdown of the free press. Examples include:

Serbia is at this moment the most romantic country in the world – we all live by candlelight [a joke about power cuts during sanctions and bombings]

The opposition had good results at the elections. No one got killed

Our past is awful, our present terrible: it's lucky that we don't have a future (Sombatpoonsiri, 2015, p. 32)

This is similar to the experience of Sarajevo during the siege, where artists subverted war propaganda through poster design and distribution. As one collector of these works, Daoud Sarhandi (2001, p. 12) notes, the choice of posters was a practical one: 'With normal channels of information shut down, and no mass-media outlets, the only news available came by word of mouth' and posters. These often employed humour, as 'Bosnians are notorious for their sharp, irreverent sense of humour, and... posters (were) often characterized by wry, black comedy' (Sarhandi, 2001, pp. 12–13). For example, *Dejtonacija* (1996) by Asim Delilović (in Sarhandi, 2001, p. 121). As noted by Sarhandi (2001), this is a play on words<sup>59</sup> indicating the negative and contradictory impacts of the Dayton agreement, specifically in relation to returns programmes, hence the list of towns underneath the word (see figure 7.2 below).

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<sup>59</sup> Dayton is spelled 'Dejton' in Bosnian and detonation is 'detonacija'



*Figure 7.2: Dejtonacije (1996) by Asim Delalović, photo in 'Evil doesn't live here: posters of the Bosnian war' (2001), Daoud Sarhandi and Alina Boboc*

Both Sarhandi (2001) and Sombatpoonsiri (2015) underline the anti-establishment and revolutionary meaning in these humorous activities. Whilst humour remains a key strategy in artistic practice and everyday life, if we speak historically of its revolutionary potential in Serbia and Bosnia during the nineties, unfortunately, corruption was replaced with corruption, and war and bombing with never-ending transition/stagnation. To outsiders, to go as far as to joke that being under bomb fire or siege was preferable to the present-day situation of Serbia and Bosnia may seem extreme or make us uncomfortable. But this raises questions of both survivors' desire and right to joke about trauma, and the perceptions of those with no direct experience of trauma.

This response to traumatic situations is not limited to the former Yugoslavia and the horrifically violent events that happened there. The question of humour in relation to trauma has been explored extensively in the context of the Holocaust and specifically Holocaust survivors. The idea that people could joke about such experiences is very shocking to most people but as literary theorist Jude Polsky (2002) states, those face to face with trauma or danger often make the most jokes. Theories for this usually take two forms. First, as Liz Willis (2007, p. 81) outlines in her medical study of humour and conflict, it acts as a 'safety valve which allow(s) modified expressions of people's worst fears, helping them to endure'. Second, as Jewish Studies professor Adam

Rovner (2012, p. 9) claims, tragedy equals acceptance whereas ‘laughter is a rebellion against the given’. I believe that humour acts in both senses but I reject the passive quality that is often implied by the former. Of course it can be a coping mechanism but I do not assign this as a passive or weak trait. Humour can act as ‘a vital tool ... in the processing of (events)’ (Morton, 2007, p. 213) but one that is often ignored or denied in contexts that are viewed as beyond humour, especially for a Western audience. We have therefore limited the ways in which humour can be analysed. By reinserting this vital element of Bosnia into the literature, my research contributes to a deeper knowledge of place through an engagement with everyday practices and relationships with history and trauma.

Coping through humour, especially in the context of the Holocaust, was seen by survivors as a way to maintain humanity (Polsky, 2002; Rosenberg, 2002). It was an act of rebellion against the forced submission and dehumanisation of the camps. In his examination of Holocaust fiction, Adam Rovner (2012) draws on Erving Goffman’s (1961) critique of the perceived ‘moral career of the survivor’. Following traumatic events, survivors are expected to speak out but the ways that we, the public, allow this are still very restricted to the realm of the serious and sombre. However, the contrast between the severity of an event and a humorous response can provoke a more profound and self-reflexive reaction from audiences. It is in these spaces of dissonance that we begin to question events, history and our own complicity.

Some artworks that adopted a humourous approach to the Holocaust can be seen to employ the technique of overidentification. Bosnian and Holocaust artists therefore share similar patterns of humour in the context of extreme ethnicised violence. For example, Historian Pnina Rosenberg (2002) discusses the humour of the graphic booklets of Horst Rosenthal in the Gurs camp during the Second World War. This was both a humorous guide to surviving the camp and a further animalisation of the prisoners, almost like a zoo guide. By acknowledging and taking on the animal quality assigned to him and the other prisoners by the Nazis, Rosenthal was subverting perceptions of himself and others, and holding on to his humanity, which he viewed as his ability to laugh and create.

A similar approach to survival can be seen in Bosnia in the guide brought out by FAMA during the siege of Sarajevo. FAMA International was an independent media company (1991-2011) and their *Sarajevo Survival Guide* (1993) is set out like a tourist guide with sections such as 'Sarajevo by Night', 'The Modern Sarajevan', and 'Parks and Recreation' (Prstojević, 1993). However, these are all humorous accounts of how war has affected life in the city. Some similarities between this and the Gurs camp guide can be seen in the darkly comic comments about diets and the roboticisation of people and their daily routines. The guide shows both an overidentification with the victimised city and subjugation to its new laws. However at the same time, it demonstrates resistance and resilience through the ability to laugh.

In Gurs, culture continued as 'a heroic act to maintain a semblance of normal life' (Rosenberg, 2002, p. 283). This is relevant to the case of Sarajevo too, where 'the artist became ... the symbol of the siege' and of hope (Zildžo, 2006, p. 145) After much description of the ways in which people were dehumanised by war, both Rosenthal and FAMA's (1993) humorously negative guides close with some form of optimism and affirmation of the strength of culture and laughter:

You should know when to skip a meal, how to turn trouble into a joke and be relaxed in impossible moments... Use the telephone when it works, laugh when it doesn't. You'll laugh a lot (Prstojević, 1993, p. 93)

The concept of laughter and humour in such traumatic contexts might seem shocking or insensitive to liberal Western audiences. But Rovner (2012, p. 5) has an alternative theory for why comedy is rejected and tragedy preferred, and that is because 'tragedy is often considered a 'high' art form and comedy a 'low' art form.' (Rovner, 2012, p. 5) It is therefore, much like pop culture, seen as beneath analysis. But humour has acted as a way for victims to deny their role as such and to reject this type of expression can be linked with some form of artistic snobbery, in which humour is not valued as much as more "serious" works. This is a mistake on two fronts because not only does humour allow people an outlet and forum for rebellion, but it can also bring art down from its seemingly elitist perch to (re)connect it with the public. As art critic David Hickey (2007) and curator Sheena Wagstaff (2007) argue, through its potential to poke fun at the artist and not just the system, humour may in fact bring art closer to



the public. This in some way brings us closer to an acknowledgement of art as politics because it is a method of '(demonstrating) an acceptance by the artist that she is also a sign; so signaling the end of authentic selfhood' (Wagstaff, 2007, p. 79). So as well as having a greater impact in the ways of processing and questioning traumatic events, humour in artistic practices might help to include the public more in a field that they often feel alienated from.

This section has demonstrated the strong position and dark quality of humour in the former Yugoslavia and controversial contexts more broadly. It has also set up some of the key debates on the relationship between trauma and humour, which will be useful in the following discussion of humourous art practices in postwar Bosnia.

### **Ridiculous disruption in Bosnian art**

I will now examine the forms of humour in contemporary Bosnian art practices, and the ways in which this is indicative of a broader antipolitical approach amongst young artists. The three key strategies I engage with are: ridicule, over-identification with certain stereotypes, and humorous engagements with memorialisation processes. This section will focus on ridicule. The works I discuss are not directly funny but they have playful elements that provoke a questioning of fragmentation and ethno-nationalist politics in Bosnia. I first explore two more of Tač.ka's projects: *Bad/Stupid?* (2012) and *The Imaginary Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2007-09); before discussing Igor Bošnjak's 2010 work *BHS*.

*Bad/Stupid?* (2012), also known as *Zvono Artwork*, engages with questions surrounding the function and fetishisation of trauma in contemporary Bosnian art. It also crystallises problems of ethnicity, and how this is manifested and negotiated in the Bosnian art scene. The project focused on the *Zvono Art Prize*, which started in 2006 as the premier award for emerging Bosnian artists. The prize is run in cooperation with various institutions and art collectives in Bosnia<sup>60</sup> and New York, and is part of a larger Balkan art award set up by regional actors and The Foundation for Civil Society (New York). However, it is felt by some that the *Zvono Art Prize* still plays to 'ethnicity' and 'war' dialogues, perpetuating something that Tač.ka sees as 'a "devil's contract" for (the) integrity of contemporary art' (Tač.ka, 2012).

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<sup>60</sup> From both Republika Srpska and the Federation

In an attempt to highlight the constant attachment to wartime ‘national keys’ (Tač.ka, 2012) in cultural politics and funding, Tač.ka set about making a video entry based on a formula they had written that they were sure was what the judges were looking for – ‘be pathetic, be guilty. War, war, war’<sup>61</sup> – and they got to the final. The entry was a video work in which Tač.ka member Igor Sovilj stands in front of the camera and talks about life, family, guilt and identity. It was all staged but plays into an expected narrative of what being Bosnian, Serb and/or diaspora is all about. Following the announcement of their successful selection as finalists, they released another video that revealed the process of applying and creating their competition entry. Soon afterwards, their entry was removed and the prize was stopped (but restarted in 2014). The reasons for this have been stated as financial<sup>62</sup> and of course cannot be attributed to Tač.ka’s intervention. However, the timing of the pause immediately after the Tač.ka “scandal” is important to note.



Figure 7.3: Still from *Bad/Stupid?* (2012), photo courtesy of Tač.ka<sup>63</sup>

The feeling embodied by groups such as Tač.ka is that whilst prizes such as the Zvono Art Prize serve an important purpose, they still perpetuate a certain ‘plot’ (Tač.ka, 2012) that restricts both art and the public. As Tač.ka member Dragan Indić

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Dragan Indić: artist and Tač.ka member (16/02/2014)

<sup>62</sup> Based on meetings and interviews with Mladen Miljanović: artist, professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy and Bosnian Pavilion representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale (18/02/2014; 09/07/2014); Maja Abdamerović: head curator of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (14/08/2014); and various conversations and interviews with Tač.ka (February 2014 – September 2015)

<sup>63</sup> The text in the image reads: ‘He drove the bike from Germany. What a feat! If only he hadn’t bought a stolen bike’

comments: ‘art in Bosnia is depressing. It’s all about war and it keeps us trapped in that.’<sup>64</sup> *Bad/Stupid?* started a process of questioning within the art scene. It played with issues of memory, truth, responsibility and integrity, and its critique of the Zvono Art Prize was effective in the sense that it was not a straightforward critique. Any objections to the work were based on parallels drawn by interpreters between the revelation of the fraudulent process of production and the process of the Zvono Art Prize itself.

So why is the work humorous and why does that matter? It is not humour in the straightforward sense, however it was seen as a playful middle finger to cultural institutions in Bosnia.<sup>65</sup> On some levels we can see a utilisation of the humour of over-identification (see Kuus, 2008) with, in this case, a “Serb” identity. But also through the example image I have chosen (figure 7.3), a broader Yugoslav identity as well, since stealing and selling stolen goods, especially bicycles, is a common regional stereotype. Through this work the identity of the “poor” Bosnian but aggressive “Serb” is played upon and contrasted. And the revelation of its fraudulent nature disrupted accepted geopolitical narratives of war and ethnicity in Bosnia in order to hint at the alternative nuances of identity and relationships to these events.

Although cast out by institutions following *Bad/Stupid?*, all of the artists I spoke with were strong supporters of Tač.ka’s work. Despite being perhaps more observant of the “rules” that govern Bosnian art, artists also viewed similar patterns of expectations to those outlined in *Bad/Stupid?*<sup>66</sup> The continued support of Tač.ka’s work and acknowledgement of common problems in terms of limitations in the field of art suggests alternative networks of solidarity are at work amongst artists in Bosnia. By this I mean that following the logic of the discourses of fragmentation and the postwar identities that are represented in the Zvono Art Prize, it might be assumed that isolated ethnic groups are forced to collide at “intercultural” events. However, the Zvono Art Prize is viewed by artists and cultural workers as a national prize, with ‘national’

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Dragan Indić: artist and Tač.ka member (16/02/2014)

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Jon Blackwood: art historian, curator and editor of the Sarajevo Culture Bureau (20/06/2014)

<sup>66</sup> Based on meetings and interviews with Mela Žuljević: project coordinator and designer of the Abart collective, Mostar 2008-2012 (25/05/2014); Borjana Mrđa: artist and professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy (17/06/2014; 08/07/2014); Mladen Miljanović: artist, professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy and Bosnian Pavilion representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale (18/02/2014; 09/07/2014)

meaning an inclusive Bosnian label. Identification and solidarity are much more along the lines of being young, financially struggling, Bosnians who are restricted in terms of how they are able to live and represent themselves in everyday life.

Tač.ka's project reveals what is hidden in most discourses of post-Dayton Bosnia by creating space to question identities, and in which the reality of the problems young people face is brought to the fore. My argument is not that people are unaware that ethnicity is used as a diversion tactic from the real problems of Bosnia, and that art therefore somehow reveals this. My argument is that studies and international interest in Bosnian art (see for example Simmons, 2010) currently reinforce the idea that ethnicity and war defines society by prioritising works that speak to that theme. Even if this art is worlds apart from ethno-nationalist politics, by prioritising these themes artists entrench ideas of fragmentation. Tač.ka's approach in *Bad/Stupid?* allows audiences to step outside of this for a moment to question current cultural-political structures.

*Bad/Stupid?* also demonstrates a degree of continuity and identification with Yugoslavia through humour and art practices due to its similarity to New Collectivism's sketch for a Youth Day poster (1987). New Collectivism were part of the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) movement, which originated in Slovenia but spread across Yugoslavia and the world. The groups that made up NSK included: the visual arts collective Irwin; the theatre groups Scipion Nasice, Red Pilot and Noordung; the design group New Collectivism; and, perhaps most famously, the music group Laibach (Monroe, 2005). A key focus of NSK's work was state deconstruction and they initiated the concept of reclaiming rather than commemorating traumas and defeats (Monroe, 2011). NSK even established its own "state" with embassies across the world, in which membership was based purely on artistic practice and ideals, and some Bosnians managed to escape on these "passports" towards the end of the war (Monroe, 2011). These were not real passports in the sense of being attached to an officially recognised state but in the confusion of war, peacekeeping forces were occasionally fooled into thinking they were. Together the various artists and groups under the NSK label worked on 'a "retrograde" approach to history' (Monroe, 2011, p. 162). As cultural theorist Alexei Monroe (2011, p. 162) explains in his extensive research on NSK, the collective directly

confronted art and history ‘to work through some of the most traumatic moments of their local and cultural contexts.’ This is evident in New Collectivism’s Youth Day poster, which I will now discuss further.

In 1987, the design wing of NSK, New Collectivism, submitted a sketch for the national Youth Day poster based on Richard Klein’s *The Third Reich* (1936) (Erjavec, 2003; Gržinić, 2003). Klein’s poster was a Nazi propaganda piece and NSK’s design only included minor alterations to the original. It won the competition but when the origins of its design were discovered, the poster was removed, New Collectivism were censored, and there were even attempts to imprison them. As with another wing of NSK, Laibach, New Collectivism were not Nazi sympathisers. As Gržinić (2003, p. 250) describes:

Instead of a direct subversion, we were faced with an almost fanatical identification with the totalitarian ritual performed ... The ideological totalitarian structure was undermined not by parodic imitation – subversion of the totalitarian codes, but by the identification with it.

NSK’s totalitarian identification is not a comment on Yugoslavia per se, but rather a critique of the entire concept of statehood, which is something that contemporary Bosnian artists also identify with. The connection with Tač.ka’s *Bad/Stupid?* project is that they both critique the system by seemingly following the rules. The participants behave as normal contestants in a competition before the revelation of their true critical aims. The only difference is that Tač.ka revealed themselves, whereas New Collectivism waited for somebody else to notice. It is unclear what would have happened if nobody did, however the joke would have had to have been revealed at some point, even if only to a select group.

The degree of continuity in the humour, experimental and collective practices employed by regional artists might contradict the notion of a destroyed Yugoslavia, or rather the destroyed networks that existed during the Yugoslav period. There is a strong connection with Yugoslav practices and politics, even if not actively identified as such. This continuity suggests that art practices in the region flow more within

broader Yugoslav borders than individual post-Yugoslav ones. This is something I will explore further in the next two chapters.

Another work that illustrates disruption of the status quo through humour is Tač.ka's *Imaginary Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2007-09). As with *Bad/Stupid?*, *The Imaginary Pavilion* started a process of questioning amongst artists and cultural workers in the region, which concluded with the first Bosnian pavilion in over a decade in 2013, albeit divorced from Tač.ka and holding its own controversies. This work was a performative piece comprised of many parts, which took place in both Venice and Bosnia during the long period in which Bosnia was not represented at the Biennale. It employed humourous techniques to highlight the pettiness and futility of national/entity politics. The controversies and questions raised in the work included, but were not limited to, language, identity, representation, isolation and exploitation. Culturally, the main question of the project was simple: why has Bosnia not been represented at the Biennale for (what was at the time) almost a decade? However, the responses and dialogues raised in the process demonstrated the broader ways in which geopolitical narratives and structures in Bosnia are a block to moving forward.<sup>67</sup>

First, Tač.ka members visited the Venice Biennale for the project and filmed themselves asking volunteers and visitors if they could direct them to the Bosnian pavilion. Nobody ever questioned its existence; they just tried to direct Tač.ka members to the Serbian or Montenegrin pavilions, or were confused that they could not find it. Whilst in Venice, Tač.ka members also placed a black dot in various locations at the Biennale and photographed it as documentation of the symbolic representation of Bosnia's presence at the event. The black dot is similar to a full stop, which is what Tač.ka (or, specifically, tačka) translates to (full stop, period, point). They displayed documentation of these happenings in their own *Imaginary Pavilion* in Banja Luka, Republika Srpska. Here they held a number of public events and discussions on the representation (or lack thereof) of Bosnia at international events such as the Biennale. I will not discuss in great detail the parts that took place in Venice, instead I focus on the display, documentation and discussions that took place in the *Imaginary Pavilion* they erected in Banja Luka (2009).

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<sup>67</sup> in this case, organising a pavilion

One anecdote from the project in particular highlights the ways in which culture and representation are used as tools for leverage amongst political parties and hold back progress. The pavilion in Banja Luka sparked a debate concerning the sign above the door, which read simply 'Босна и Херцеговина' (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Requests for Tač.ka to remove the sign were based on the fact that in the eyes of Republika Srpska authorities, if Tač.ka wanted to use the Cyrillic (Serbian) alphabet, they should write only Republika Srpska, not Bosnia and Herzegovina. Likewise, some people from the Federation objected to them having a Bosnian pavilion and writing the country's name in the Serbian alphabet. Tač.ka's compromise was to remove only some letters, to read 'Бос и говна' (bos i govna), which translates to 'barefoot and shit'. No requests to remove the sign were put forward after this, and the exhibition and discussions went ahead as planned.

That people were more willing to accept profanity in a public space than a sign that incorporated the many elements that make up the country is extremely telling, and it highlighted a key issue underlying the question of Bosnia's absence at the Biennale: that authorities struggle to conceptualise or agree to conceptualise Bosnia as a unified space. From the artists' perspective, they were putting forward a clear sign that is reiterated by many working in the cultural field, which is that they do not care what minor changes or squabbles political parties want to have. They just want to proceed with their work and make things happen. If that means that the sign for the *Imaginary Pavilion* must read 'barefoot and shit', then the artists are willing to accept this in order to simply carry out their real work, which was to establish a space to discuss artistic representation and Bosnia.

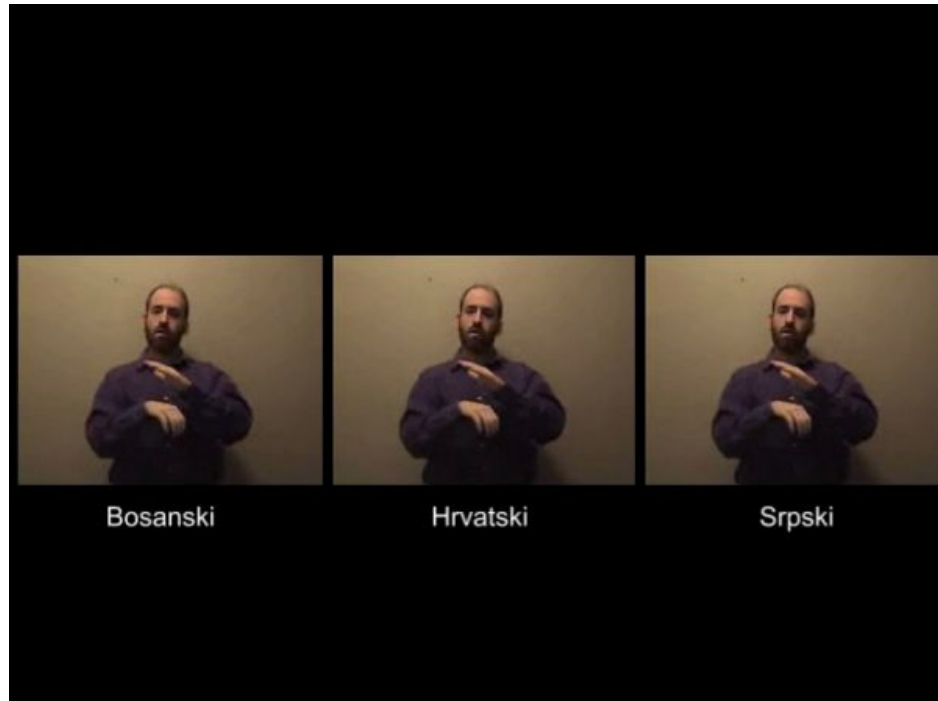


Figure 7.4: *The Imaginary Pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Banja Luka 2009, photo courtesy of Tač.ka*

Much like *Bad/Stupid?*, the humour of this part of *The Imaginary Pavilion* is subtle and was made even more so because it was an unintentional addition to the overall project. However by ridiculing the ethno-linguistic politics of the region by following the imposed rules, Tač.ka members were able to add an additional layer to their analysis of the (lack of) representation of Bosnia at the Venice Biennale.

Igor Bošnjak also approaches the issue of ethno-linguistic politics in his 2010 work *BHS*. This is a silent video work in which Bošnjak simultaneously signs a text in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian (in local language, Bosanski, Hrvatski and Srpski, hence the title *BHS*). It was a response to a recent (at the time) decision in Bosnia to employ three sign language interpreters at television stations for the “three” respective languages. Starting with only the three simultaneous and identical videos, before fading in each language name underneath, the video employs two elements of humour. First, by looping infinitely it increasingly highlights the stupidity of the emphasis on difference between the three languages through the repetition of the same signs that are ultimately rendered meaningless. The second level we see is a form of over-identification. By ostensibly accepting the three forms of signing under the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian standards, Bošnjak simultaneously highlights the outward acceptance of their individuality, whilst at the same time demonstrating a strong rejection of the conception of them as separate.





*Figure 7.5 Still from Igor Bošnjak's BHS (2010), photo courtesy of artist*

As I have already explained, in the former Yugoslavia, linguistic relationships are very hard to define or agree on. Language in the region has shifted from Serbian and Croatian, to Serbo-Croatian, then it broke off into Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, and even Montenegrin. As socio-linguist P. Jacobson (2008) discusses, the key question is whether or not they differ significantly enough to be classed as separate languages, or are simply dialects of the same. The emphasis on difference and establishing independent languages is certainly more to do with employing it as a political tool. The establishment of Serbo-Croatian was an attempt to unify the peoples of Yugoslavia, whereas the splitting of the languages into increasingly smaller areas can be viewed as the reverse (Jacobson, 2008). The simple fact is that it is impossible for any of the successor languages to move away from the same structure and rules without changing incomprehensibly (Jacobson, 2008). The goal of intensified work by language planners post-1991 has been to ensure that each of the languages is accepted as independent. In reality the main alterations have been lexical because this is 'the only open linguistic category' (Jacobson, 2008, p. 36).

Bosnia is the most complex region in this sense, since it is home to all three of the major ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia. The question of language is not whether or not all three should be accepted as individual and distinct, but rather that

all three languages are mutually comprehensible without any difficulty. Bošnjak does not aim to undermine or ignore differences in his work but to show how, especially in terms of language, these differences are prioritised too much. Proceedings at every level take longer and cost more due to the insistence that documents be translated three times (or at least twice).<sup>68</sup> This time and money could be used more wisely elsewhere and is yet another example of small political disputes that get in the way of actual political progress.

This section has outlined how subtle approaches to humour in art can provoke a questioning of the status quo in Bosnia. This is due to the dissonance between the serious subject matter and humourous approach. For local audiences, it might open up space for them to question contemporary issues in Bosnia and their position in relation to this. For the international community, it can maybe help them to reconsider their role in entrenching discourses of division and ethno-nationalist violence. In academic terms, it establishes humour as a valuable analytical tool when considering the relationship between art, politics and identity.

### **Playing along to subvert stereotypes: creative employments of overidentification**

I will now explore a more overtly humourous tactic that has been previously outlined in the field of geopolitics by Kuus (2008) in her discussion of *The Good Soldier Svejk*. This tactic is of overidentification with certain stereotypes in order to reappropriate and subvert them. If Todorova (2009) asserts that Balkan stereotypes have been entrenched over the centuries through the Western imagination, then I will demonstrate how humourous subversion of this can reclaim identities. In addition to acting as a resistance tactic in the former Yugoslavia, humourous overidentification can bring art and the general public closer together. As art critic David Hickey (2007, p. 120) argues, the art world and its relationship to the public is too distanced and exclusive, producing ‘an ongoing referendum on how things should look and the way we should look at them.’ By making fun of themselves and society, artists may be able to remove this divide by demystifying art and bonding through humour. To explore these questions and the use of humourous overidentification in art, I discuss the *Be Hilarious* project (Mostar), and the works of Selma Selman and Damir Nikšić.

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<sup>68</sup> Three times would be into Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian. The more common double translation would simply be using both Latin and Cyrillic alphabets.

The first time I met artist Mladen Miljanović, he made the following comment to me about foreign interest in Bosnia: ‘We are exotic. It’s like a safari for you.’<sup>69</sup> Miljanović and many Bosnians are clearly aware of the ‘wild Balkan’ stereotype outlined by Goldsworthy (2013) and Todorova (2009). And they employ these characterisations or stereotypes humorously, as a way of both acknowledging and rejecting them. This is drawn out literally in the *Be Hilarious (BH)* project of iHouse Travel, Mostar.

The *BH* project created a series of images humourously depicting different scenes and ways of life in various towns and areas of Bosnia. Drawing on regional connections with flora and fauna, people are depicted as animals. But this is also connected with fables (*basna*) from around the former Yugoslavia that give human characteristics to animals. There is even a regional joke about Bosnia: ‘what is the difference between Bosnia (*bosna*) and fables (*basna*). In fables, animals speak like people but in Bosnia people speak like animals.’<sup>70</sup> There also exist a large amount of Mujo and Haso jokes based on two fictional, and not very intelligent, Bosnian friends and occasionally Mujo’s long-suffering wife, Fata. This could seem offensive to some, but it is part of a broader tradition of regional stereotyping and humour. Much like UK citizens attribute certain comically exaggerated attributes to various regions of the country, so too did the former Yugoslavia. And as Sombatpoonsiri (2015, p. 30) notes in her study of humour and non-violent struggle in Serbia, ethnic jokes ‘are considered prototypical of Yugoslav black humour because the jokes contain “self-racism”, where an ethnic group mocks its own stereotype.’ In this way, humour can be seen as a way of acknowledging and subverting regional stereotypes.

In the *BH* project, we see depictions of Bosnian stereotypes put into animal form. Miran Hasibović was the driving force behind the project, which placed these images on souvenirs for purchase, as well as prints. *BH* is therefore not a straightforward art example, but it employed local illustrator Zoran Zelenika and artist Maja Rubinić, who also runs the only independent gallery space in Mostar (Virus). Even if not sold or displayed as art in the traditional sense, the images are entangled in the local art

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Mladen Miljanović: artist, professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy and Bosnian Pavilion representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale (09/07/2014)

<sup>70</sup> Koja je razlika između bosna i basna? U basni životinje pričaju kao ljudi a u bosni ljudi pričaju kao životinje

scene and employ similar techniques. The combination of art and tourism lends an additional angle when considering how or whether art can play a role in shaping identity or perceptions. People can create art and audiences can take something from that. But placing art in the tourist/souvenir context opens it out to a wider audience. Of course, it is not “high art” however, perhaps this makes it more accessible. I also feel that the humour and subject matter of the project are so very emblematic of Bosnia, and that it uses this to strip away international perceptions and regional stereotypes. Miran and the artists are essentially both poking fun at themselves and international perceptions of them as primitive people with strange customs and bad habits. *BH* opens out the field of art but I think in the context of Bosnia, it also serves as an educational and economic tool. It brings in money through sales, and whilst not a totally serious education, it might make tourists come away with something other than the famous tourist sites and war.

Three examples that I particularly like are the train scene, the café and the wedding. In the train scene (figure 7.6), we see a contrast between the beauty of the route and the landscape of Bosnia. They are smoking drinking and disrespecting nature. Dumping in areas of natural beauty is a serious problem in Bosnia and certainly fits with an animalistic view of people when they are at their worst.



Figure 7.6: Train scene from the *Be Hilarious* project, iHouse Travel, Mostar

The café (figure 7.7) is a direct attribution of a quality of a specific animal. In Bosnia, the badger is seen as a sly character<sup>71</sup> and here we see him as a café owner. Café culture in Bosnia is very alive but in a different way to Western Europe. People spend

<sup>71</sup> Field notes from conversation with Miran Hasibović: director of iHous Travel, Mostar and the *Be Hilarious* project (25/05/2014)

their days in cafes, often getting drunk because they have nothing else to do due to high unemployment and economic decline. Here the criticism is of the café owners looking to profit from people's misery.<sup>72</sup>



Figure 7.7: Cafe scene from the *Be Hilarious* project, iHouse Travel, Mostar

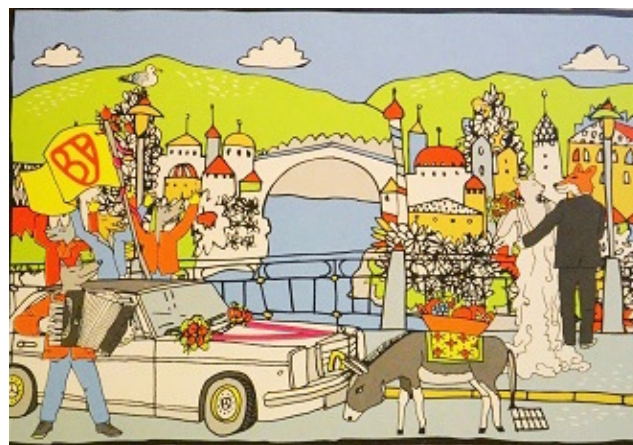


Figure 7.8: Wedding scene from the *Be Hilarious* project, iHouse Travel, Mostar

Finally, the wedding scene (figure 7.8) is a ridiculous parade of (non-existent) wealth and traditional values. Always over the top, it is a flamboyant show from people who in reality have nothing. The overall criticisms are aimed at the transitional economy, which has made people poor but kept them compliant with alcohol and aspirational consumerism. The growth of traditional values and customs along with what sociologists Slavnić et al. (2013) describe as ‘wild capitalism’ has heightened problems in postwar Bosnian society. The depiction of people as animals is effective not only because of its connection to regional fables, but also in the near-universal attribution of a mass mentality and certain characteristics to animals.

<sup>72</sup> Field notes from conversation with Miran Hasibović: director of iHous Travel, Mostar and the *Be Hilarious* project (25/05/2014)

I will now discuss the work of Sarajevo artist Damir Nikšić. The humour of overidentification is nowhere more prevalent than in his video works. As art historian Jon Blackwood (2015) notes, with his own YouTube channel, Nikšić managed to use the Internet and social media to position himself as one of the most regionally successful Bosnian artists. Many of the works involve him taking on certain regional or international stereotypes regarding a variety of topics. Repetition of phrases to highlight their ridiculous quality and the creation of absurd songs are two common themes in his works. One of the most famous is *If I wasn't a Muslim* (2005). It opens with a stereotypical Bosnian village scene and traditional music playing in the background. Nikšić then gives an intro in heavily accented English, before bursting into 'If I wasn't Muslim' to the tune of 'If I were a rich man'. The lyrics focus on everything from war atrocities, to regional Orientalism, to European hypocrisy and the Othering of Muslims. But at the same time, the Muslim character is ridiculously over-stereotyped. Nobody is safe regionally or internationally. Here Nikšić is comically highlighting the culpability of all and the dangers of dwelling on victimisation. As in all of his videos, he breaks down stereotypes and political squabbling by overidentifying with those characteristics and stances. The fact that he has become so popular online is indicative of both the prominence of humour in Bosnian society and its ability to perhaps broaden discussions of controversial or taboo subjects. A pro and con of Nikšić's work is that he holds up a mirror to society, both national and international, by offering up characterised versions of themselves. This creates interesting works and perspectives, but the possibility of pushing too far is never far off and could close the space for discussion back up again.

To close this section, I will discuss the works of Selma Selman, which demonstrate the more subtle machinations of humour in contemporary art practices. Her video works are not meant to be directly funny but they employ similar techniques, create a similar result, and whenever I have seen them with local audiences, they always laugh. She is one of the new rising stars of contemporary Bosnian art. Born in Bihać in 1991, Selman is particularly notable for her identity as a Roma, which is still the most marginalised ethnic group in the former Yugoslavia. As in most countries, having a negative attitude towards Roma communities is still the most acceptable form of racism. By acceptable I mean that nobody thinks anything of it or questions these attitudes. Selman strongly identifies with her position as both a female and Roma

artist. Her works *Do not look into gypsy eyes* (2013), *Do you have a boyfriend* (2013) and *16000 Parts* (2014) all employ overidentification and repetition to some extent and the result is not always comfortable. *Do not look into gypsy eyes* (2013) is a video work in which Selman takes on the stereotype of a gypsy woman, repeating phrases such as 'Do not look into a gypsy's eyes. Anything can happen. I can put a spell on you.' Whereas *Do you have a boyfriend* (2013) is connected with female experience more broadly, but particularly that of Balkan women. Questions about marital status are repeated ad infinitum, especially once you reach a certain age. Selman aims to reject these phrases by reappropriating and subverting them.

People's reactions to her work are interesting, especially in relation to *16000 Parts*, which was included in a talk about the young art scene in Republika Srpska by the curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Banja Luka, Žana Vukičević, at *Ars Kozara* 2015. This edition of the *Ars Kozara* project included international participants from China, Brazil and Italy. One of my roles was therefore as a translator, which opened up or at least solidified the issue of translatability in my research. I realised that translating people's presentations about their art not only had to be linguistically comprehensible, but contextually comprehensible. It was difficult to keep up with the linguistic translation because in order for internationals to understand some artworks, it was necessary to explain many contextual details. This was especially true for humour.

*16000 Parts* is Selman's recording of two of her family members arguing over their metals business, how bad one of them is at mathematics, and how the other is a cheat. During the talk at *Ars Kozara*, all of the twenty-five locals found *16000 Parts* hilarious, which was not readily understandable to the five internationals or even myself.<sup>73</sup> I am aware that people mock Roma ways of speaking and behaving, but the universal laughter at a video that was not intended to be straightforwardly funny certainly puts a spotlight on the audience and the general treatment of Roma. Selman won the (newly restarted) 2014 Zvono Art Prize with *16000 Parts* and is now studying and working at Syracuse University, New York. She has therefore managed to break through stereotypes and surpass many of her colleagues through humour and

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<sup>73</sup> Field notes from *Ars Kozara* 2015: 16/08/2015

overidentification, a method that does not allow us to hide from some ugly truths and common misconceptions.

In his discussion of humour in films from the former Yugoslavia, Horton (2002) talks about the very subtle and contextually-driven humour of the region. However, as anthropologists Carty and Musharbash (2008) note, the question of the translatability of humour is global. It is therefore not an issue that is unique to the countries of the former Yugoslavia, but it is essential to analyse when considering humour in regional art practices. To criticise regional specificity is not the appropriate response, especially when considering humour and art's contribution to deeper regional knowledge and understanding. But an acknowledgement of specificity is essential.

Carty and Musharbash (2008) discuss the benefits of studying humour and all of its specificities. It is something that is extremely socially significant, but disciplinarily marginalised:

The inversions, reversals, subversions, the breaking of rules and crossing of invisible lines that characterize humourous phenomena may have some universal shapes and shifts, but they remain intimately and often exclusively localized in their nuance and content. This *should* guarantee laughter and humour a central place in anthropological writing and theory; curiously, however, it does not (Carty and Musharbash, 2008, p. 213).

All of the examples I have discussed illuminate aspects of Bosnian history, politics, society and culture that cannot be readily seen or understood in other fields. It is problematic that so much explanation is required, however through this explanation, greater knowledge can be obtained.

This section has outlined a key feature of humour in contemporary Bosnian art, and one that can help to move the literature on Balkan Othering (Bakic-Hayden, 1995; Goldsworthy, 2013; Todorova, 2009) forward. By fixing on ways that artists subvert regional and international stereotypes, my research reinserts agency into the study of geography, politics and identity in contemporary Bosnia. Whilst not always readily translatable, if international scholars and audiences can push past this, humour could



add significantly to studies of the region by offering more nuanced views of fragmentation, social relationships and regional stereotypes.

### **Mocking foundational myths: humorous approaches to memorialisation and invented traditions**

In Bosnia there has been great investment in memorialisation by various religious and political parties as part of collective efforts to shape individual histories and traditions. Investment in building monuments and religious spaces is greater than spending on essential public services. As one informant commented: ‘Until two years ago, Prijedor hospital didn’t have a mammographer but churches... they always have money.’<sup>74</sup> Religious spaces and monuments to specific victim groups continue the battle to define areas as Serb, Muslim or Croat, whilst ignoring the needs of citizens as individuals. I will now analyse three works that explore memorialisation practices in a humorous fashion. First, two monuments: the *Memorial to the IC* in Sarajevo and the *Mostar Bruce Lee*; before moving on to Damir Nikšić’s 2013/14 piece *Bosnian and Herzegovinian Historical Paintings: Tradition of Non-Existence*.

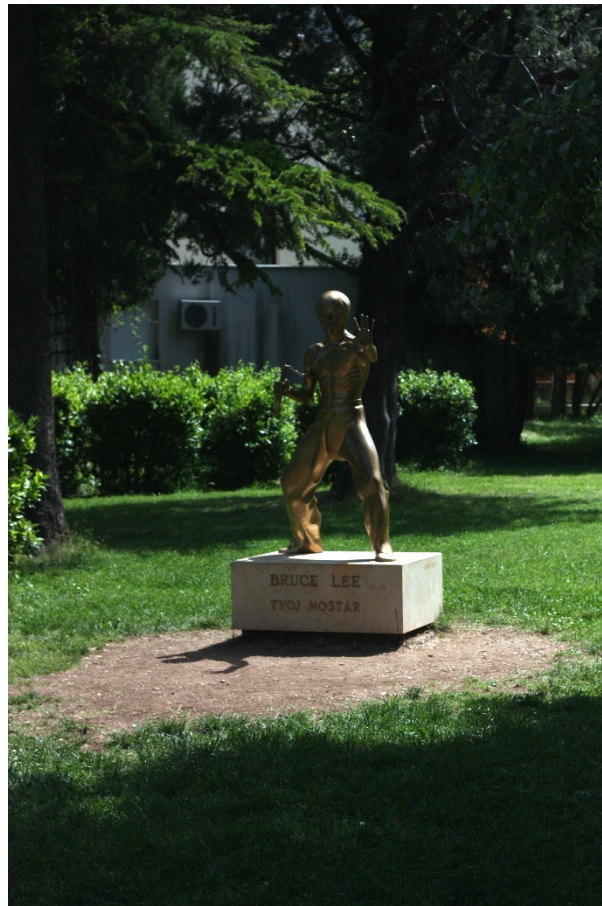
The *Memorial to the international community* was erected next to the Sarajevo History Museum in April 2007. It was a collective work based out of the Sarajevo Centre for Contemporary Arts and consists of a giant tin of spam (a standard UN aid supply during the war) on a platform dedicated to the international community. The humour works on multiple levels. First, it is a comment on the international community’s (in)action during the war. Spam is a key indicator of their naïve intervention. Not only was it hated by everybody, but as the majority of Sarajevo residents during the war were Muslim, they were unable to eat it because it is a pork-based product. There is a broader critique however, and that is of international perceptions and projects in Bosnia, of which spam is merely one comic symbol.

The monument functions as a humorous interruption in a serious space. Situated next to the museum, which houses an extensive exhibit documenting the siege of Sarajevo, a memorial might certainly be expected. Placing a spam monument to the international community causes both locals and visitors to stop and think. For locals it is a nice in-joke that reminds them that despite their experiences, they can still laugh.

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Sladjana Miljević: head of the Progetto Prijedor NGO (17/06/2014)

For internationals, the joke would be unclear but herein lies the strength of the work. It is not an aggressive attack on the international community, but a joke about their misguided actions, actions that continue to be misguided today. It is clear to visitors that it is not a straightforward commemoration either though. It therefore provokes a questioning and curiosity for further information. This adds to individual thought and knowledge acquisition regarding Sarajevo and its citizens.



*Figure 7.9: Mostar Bruce Lee (2005), May 25 2014*

Commemoration and public remembering are not only pushed by the international community. Different ethnic groups have also been competing to commemorate losses, and rewrite history and space since the start of the war. The *Mostar Bruce Lee* (figure 7.9) is a direct response to this, standing in one of the main parks as ‘a sly rebuke to the ongoing use of public spaces to glorify the country’s competing nationalisms’ (Zaitchik, 2006, p. 60). The appropriation of public space to solidify the status of competing nationalisms is particularly heightened in Mostar, a city that in many ways really is still divided. After an initial attack by Serb paramilitary forces, the main war raged between the Croat and Muslim population, which destroyed much of the city including the famous bridge. Today there exist separate schools, theatres,

universities, postal, bus and refuse services for Croats and Muslims.<sup>75</sup> Like everywhere in Bosnia, these divisions are not so clear-cut but they are certainly more palpable than in other parts of the country.

Both Croats and Muslims are building monuments, churches and mosques, and the international community is constantly trying to (re)build an integrated society. As anthropologist Robert Hayden (2007) highlights in his article on the ways in which international involvement in the former Yugoslavia has been skewed by its vision of what postwar society “should be”, the destruction of the bridge in Mostar was seen as an overarching symbol of the destruction of Bosnia. Its reconstruction was seen in equally symbolic terms regarding the rebuilding of postwar society. This was based on misplaced identification of the bridge as the one in the Yugoslav author Ivo Andrić’s Nobel Prize-winning book *Bridge on the Drina*, which is viewed by Westerners as the archetypal depiction of Bosnian history and society. Hayden (2007) points out that the Mostar bridge is not the correct one from the book, which had in fact been left to rot and crumble for many years until the film director Emir Kusturica stepped in to create his historic Disneyland in Višegrad. Emir Kusturica is a Bosnian film director of mixed Serb-Muslim heritage. During Yugoslavia, he became a cult film director, representing local underground/alternative culture and winning awards in Cannes and Berlin. However, during the war, he aligned himself exclusively with Serbs and Serbia, he moved to Serbia, and started building his own ethno-village in the Tara mountain region. In 2014, after five years of construction, he opened Andrićgrad, a reconstruction of parts of historic Višegrad. So ironically, the real bridge and location that Andrić based his archetypal Bosnian novel around was not saved by peacebuilding international community workers, but in some ways coopted by a rather right-wing ethno-nationalist.

Additionally, Hayden (2007) notes that the mistakenly chosen bridge in Mostar does not practically unite communities on either side of the city divide. It has therefore been a very expensive white elephant in postwar reconstruction. This is not to say that it is not symbolic, or that it does not serve any purpose. It is a big draw for tourists and the local population do have a strong connection to it. However, the point here is that

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<sup>75</sup> The Serb population was never particularly high in Mostar and has almost disappeared since the war

the international community's vision of reconstructing Mostar is doing nothing more than adding to the construction competition to claim the city as Croat/Muslim/unified.



*Figure 7.10: Stari Most, Mostar. The famous reconstructed and now UNESCO protected bridge in Mostar's Old Town. Photo taken May 25 2014*

Erected by the Urban Movement Mostar on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2005, to many outsiders the *Mostar Bruce Lee* might seem purely fun or silly, but as Nino Raspudić of the Urban Movement Mostar explains:

A symbol gets its meaning within context, and the context of Mostar is one of a hyper-politicized town where everything is divided. This monument wants to say that a big part of our lives and values have nothing to do with war and ideology.<sup>76</sup>

The choice to erect such a monument is certainly political. However, it acts as a way of opting out of standard political debates. By choosing a symbol with no sides and

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<sup>76</sup> Nino Raspudić (2006), *Enter the Dragon*, Vagabundo Productions, 00:05:32

almost no sense, the Urban Movement Mostar make an antipolitical statement without forcing any agenda. It is a statement against monuments, ‘which serve very well as an excuse to continue the war after the war.’<sup>77</sup> Another motivation for building the monument was to give the people of Mostar something to lighten the heavy atmosphere and to make the city ‘famous for something that is not destruction, division, ethnic conflict and so on.’<sup>78</sup> This adds the Urban Movement Mostar to the number of Bosnian artists and activists who want to identify out of this narrative and focus on the present.

The choice of Bruce Lee was significant not only due to the popularity of his films in the former Yugoslavia, but also due to his lack of affiliation with anywhere that had any connection to politics and events in the region. He was not Muslim, Serb or Croat, but he also was not Western. And although he was Eastern, he worked in the West. He was therefore a nomadic and unclaimable figure, especially for citizens on either side of the divide in Mostar.

To close, I will discuss Damir Nikšić’s *Bosnian and Herzegovinian Historical Paintings: Tradition of Non-Existence*, which plays on the imagined tradition of creating a history of art. The work is a series of differently shaped and sized blank spaces marked with black tape, indicating spaces where paintings should be. Under each blank painting is a description of a fictional historical event from Bosnia that should be depicted in the painting. For example, ‘Bogumilian priests arrival to Bosnia’, and ‘The Queen Mother Catherine Vukčić Kosača with Pope Paul II in Rome’.

In this work, Nikšić first draws the audience’s attention to the fact that Bosnia does not have a tradition of historical painting because for centuries it was ruled by the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. Second, it fits into the critique of ethno-nationalist nation building in Bosnia that the *Mostar Bruce Lee* responds to. Creating an art history is much like creating a national history in general. Pictures and artists are heralded as part of the national culture and the inventing of national tradition(s). Nikšić’s work manages to avoid putting forward an argument of its own by

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<sup>77</sup> Veselin Gatalo (2006), *Enter the Dragon*, Vagabundo Productions, 00:21:23

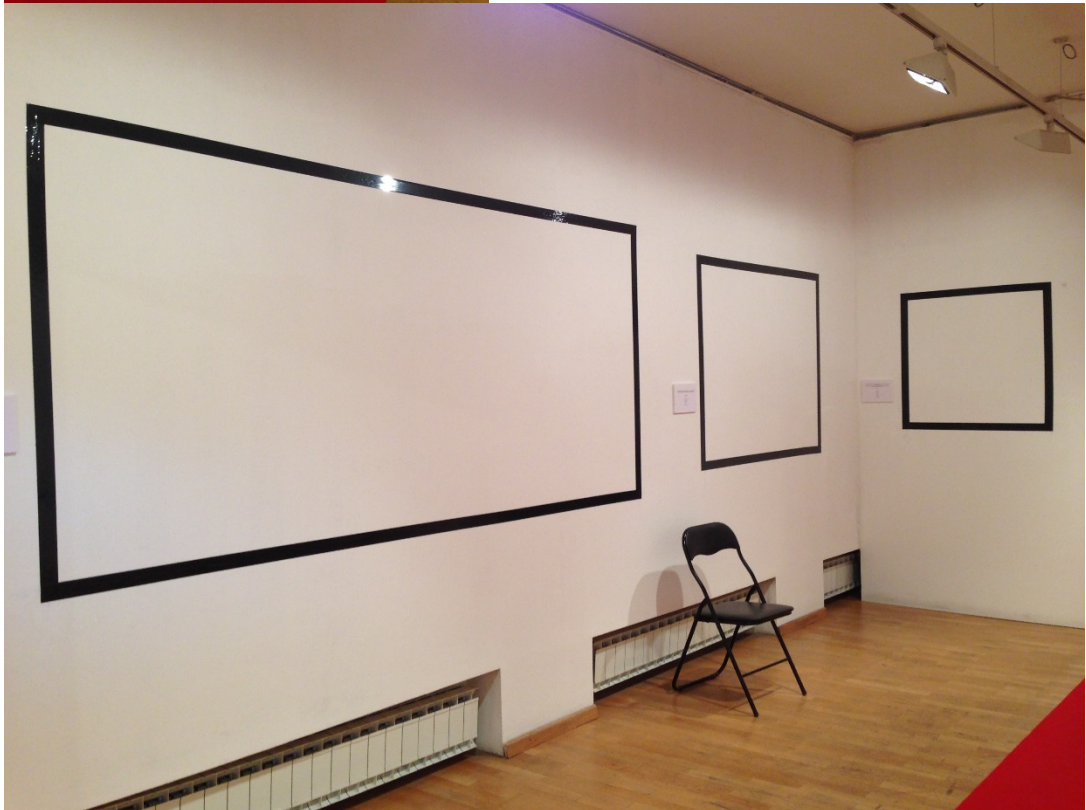
<sup>78</sup> Veselin Gatalo (2006), *Enter the Dragon*, Vagabundo Productions, 00:08:31



simultaneously presenting somewhat contradictory critiques. By this I mean that on the one hand he is acknowledging the lack of historical painting in Bosnia due to centuries of imperial domination. Yet he simultaneously critiques the whole concept of national historical paintings. Nikšić therefore opens up the question of tradition and occupation to the audience.



*Figures 7.11 and 7.12: Damir Nikšić's Bosnian and Herzegovinian Historical Paintings: Tradition of non-existence in the Desire for Freedom exhibition, National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo. May 28 2014*



This section has demonstrated how humorous engagements with memorialisation processes and public space can open up discussions surrounding geography, politics and identity in Bosnia. By analysing these works, my research moves the literature on postwar fragmentation forward by exploring alternative claims to national identity and space.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the significance of humour in contemporary art practices and its contribution to the study of post-conflict societies. Building on critiques that humour has not been accorded its rightful place as a subject of serious study (Carty and Musharbash, 2008; Higgle, 2007; Rovner, 2012), I have explored the ways in which it can help to reinsert agency and increase regional knowledge of Bosnia.

As well as exploring the continuity of humour and art practices in the former Yugoslavia, I have highlighted how approaches to humour in art practices by scholars such as Rancière (2010) limit perceptions of the relationship between humour, art and politics. Not only is humour a key indicator of alternative politics and networks in the region, the dark nature of humour in Yugoslavia also opens up debates on the relationship between trauma, humour and postwar societies. My research here shows that people in the former Yugoslavia are able to bond and express themselves more boldly through humour, and that it is not always a passive response to traumatic experiences.

The forms of humour discussed in this chapter have outlined how subtle approaches to humour in art can not only grab audiences' attention, but also provoke a questioning of the status quo. This is due to the dissonance between the serious subject matter and humorous approach. It opens up spaces for local, international and academic audiences to question their positionality in the geopolitical framing of Bosnia. But it also empowers citizens to reappropriate and subvert centuries of stereotyping and Othering.

My research has also explored the translatability of regional humour. This is a challenge for international audiences and academics because it highlights their own

limitations and positionalities. However, it can also push researchers towards deeper knowledge of the geographies, politics and identities of Bosnia.



## **Chapter Eight: Ephemeral spaces and lasting connections in the contemporary Bosnian art scene**

### **Introduction**

Whilst the previous chapters engaged with specific art practices, the following chapters are connected more to the spaces and networks that build around these practices. This chapter in particular attends to gaps in the literature on the social, political and spatial fragmentation of Bosnia. Sociology and literary scholars such as Todorova (2009) and Goldsworthy (2013) have shed light on the processes of identity construction in the region, and political geography has done much to deconstruct the processes involved in the fragmentation of Bosnia pre- and postwar (Campbell, 1999; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). Existing literature has therefore been essential in outlining the ways that spaces and identities have been (re)constructed. However, my research expands this by engaging with spaces outside of these constructions. Employing a feminist approach, I engage with voices outside of political actors, in this case artists, to explore the spaces and encounters with difference that build around art practices.

Studying inter-ethnic tolerance and communication requires more than a demographic and political assessment because a focus on political fragmentation ignores the significance of the constantly changing, temporary spaces of encounter that emerge through various networks. By exploring the networks developing around art, my research demonstrates the need for a reconceptualisation of both tolerance and fragmentation. I use the description ‘ephemeral spaces of difference’ to explore networks in postwar Bosnia. These ephemeral spaces can lead to more normalised and lasting intercultural connections. The combination of ‘ephemeral’ and ‘lasting’ might seem paradoxical however, the spaces and encounters that emerge around art practices are ephemeral, lasting anything from an evening to a month, but the connections that form in these spaces are potentially more enduring than those of neighbours forced to live side by side for decades, but who never actually interact.

I first explore the significance of ephemeral spaces of difference to discussions of fragmentation in postwar Bosnia in the political geography literature, and to the standards that are placed on postwar reintegration in studies and engagements with Bosnia. Using Prijedor municipality as my case study, I examine the encounters of

difference experienced by inhabitants of this controversial space through art projects and collaborations, as well as looking at diaspora seasons in the region. The term ‘diaspora season’ refers to periods throughout the year when the global Prijedor diaspora returns to the municipality for the holidays. My research demonstrates a need to shift our mode of analysis of fragmentation to include the regular but shifting ways that people encounter difference in postwar Bosnia. I also highlight the problems and hypocrisy surrounding standards of multicultural/inter-ethnic tolerance placed on postwar societies by the international community. The argument is not that Bosnia is a perfect example of postwar harmony, but rather that the so-called multicultural and tolerant societies of the West have a somewhat nannyish approach to tolerance in the region.

The second part moves on to focus more broadly on art networks and collaborations across Bosnia, through an examination of the evolution of art collectives in the region. Bosnian art collectives and networks could be viewed as unsustainable due to their unstable financial situations and the migratory patterns of young, creative and educated people away from Bosnia. However, my research shows that even as specific groups come and go, the underlying foundations of their work and approach towards a more functioning and integrated cultural system remain. Both of the first two sections of this chapter demonstrate alternative perspectives on postwar fragmentation that emerge when different temporalities and geographies are taken into account. By this I mean that if we focus on politics and fixed locations, we ignore the mobile networks and alternative maps that form around a number of different issues in the region that have very little to do with ethnicity.

The final section of this chapter moves beyond the borders of Bosnia to discuss the notion of Balkart (Various, 2013). This draws on a term coined by the independent publishing group Kosovo 2.0 (Luci, 2013b) and expands my discussion of fragmentation in postwar Bosnia further, not by suggesting that Yugoslavia still exists symbolically through art, but by demonstrating that cultural ties still exist between the successor states due to both necessity and the lack of a considerable shift away from Yugoslav borders.

### **Ephemeral spaces of difference: redefining concepts of fragmentation in Bosnia**

My research demonstrates the need to rethink concepts of fragmentation and tolerance in postwar Bosnia. The academic focus on formal truth and reconciliation, and reparation processes (Dragović-Soso, 2010; Dragović-Soso and Gordy, 2010; Jeffrey and Jakala, 2015, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011) alone does not present a clear picture because people are mobile and, as Oberschall (2010) has outlined, they travel in circles that are not always linked to ethnicity. This means that demographically, a city may seem multicultural, but those cultures barely interact. On the other hand, a city might seem homogenous, but plays host to countless ephemeral encounters with difference. Exploring the networks and events that happen around art in Bosnia, I highlight the alternative ways that difference is encountered. The encounters and spaces that emerge through artistic projects and collaborations are not forced attempts at (re)integration, but rather a necessary and normal result of operating in a region that is largely liminal to the broader global art market.

#### *Diaspora seasons in Prijedor*

The focus of this section is Prijedor municipality because it is a space that has been highly problematised over the years. It is also an area outside of the main urban centres, such as Mostar, Sarajevo and Banja Luka, so the opportunities to encounter difference are, in theory, more limited. Prijedor therefore offers a strong case study through which to argue my point on ephemeral spaces of difference. Due to the extreme violence that took place in the municipality, Prijedor can be viewed as a prime example of Toal and Dahlman's (2011) discussion of Bosnia as a systematically and violently destroyed landscape. During the war of the nineties, multiculturalism was destroyed not only in terms of people, but also of the spaces that marked their existence; for example, religious and cultural spaces, homes and so on. Mass graves and three of the wartime detention camps – Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje – are also located within the municipality and these sites have a complex postwar legacy. Despite this violence, Prijedor has been marked as a unique postwar reintegration success by the international community (Belloni, 2005; Sivac-Bryant, 2016), even though returns and ethnic groups tend to be clustered in certain areas. For example, Prijedor town is largely Serb, whereas the town of Kozarac, located at the foot of Kozara National Park, is largely Muslim. If we accept these demographics as indicative of postwar integration, then despite mass returns, Prijedor could still be

viewed as a fragmented space. However, I argue that diaspora season and art projects in the municipality contradict this view, and that temporary spaces of difference should be considered worthy of discussion in studies of postwar fragmentation. They show that whilst political and territorial fragmentation may have occurred, social fragmentation is a more complex phenomenon.

Diaspora season in Prijedor starts around mid-June and lasts until early September, with additional periods around big holidays such as Easter and Orthodox Christmas. Made up of a variety of migration waves and ethnicities, it is a vital opportunity for families to (re)connect themselves and their children to the place they used to call 'home'. The encounters of difference that take place during diaspora season(s) are multiple, both Muslim-Serb and global because the diaspora lives all over the world. They may not be everyday encounters, but show that in ethnic terms, the postwar outlook is not as bleak as maybe thought, since such encounters pass largely without incident.

In the towns of Kozarac and Prijedor, both located in Prijedor municipality, the demographic difference between diaspora season and the rest of the year is dramatic, mainly in terms of the population size. In Kozarac, the shift is from being a near-ghost town to being full of people and cars with license plates from across Europe.<sup>79</sup> As historian Nicolas Moll (2012, p. 195) comments in his paper the *Survivors of Prijedor*,<sup>80</sup> Kozarac 'has seen a spectacular renaissance these last years, with the construction of numerous villas by the diaspora who return to pass the summer there.'<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Sivac-Bryant (2016, p. 6) comments that: 'Today the town is known as "the biggest little city in the world" due to the size of its diaspora community around the world, who return every summer.' It is a largely wartime Muslim diaspora, those who were displaced as refugees in the nineties to escape violence in the municipality and country more broadly. However, there are some diaspora members from pre-war economic migration waves out of the country.

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<sup>79</sup> Based on observations between February 2014 and August 2015, as well as conversations with Prijedor residents and other international researchers in the municipality

<sup>80</sup> Les Survivants de Prijedor

<sup>81</sup> 'a connu une spectaculaire renaissance ces dernières années, avec la construction de nombreuses villas par la diaspora qui vient y passer tout l'été.'

Diaspora waves and ethnicities in the region should not be overly simplified. Even within a municipality such as Prijedor, which has been presented by academic and media reports as fairly black and white (Belloni, 2005; Moll, 2012), wartime displacement included both Serbs and Muslims. For example, as wartime borders shifted due to military maneuvers, depending on what area of the municipality one lived in, having a Muslim or Serb name could be problematic. Serbs from the town of Sanski Most, for example, represent a large number of internally displaced people in Prijedor town. And during the war, residents in Prijedor town had to move to Banja Luka when the Bosniak army approached. For mixed heritage families, this was even more complex. One artist who no longer lives in Bosnia comes from such a family.<sup>82</sup> Growing up in Sanski Most with a Muslim surname, his mother changed his name to her (Serb) maiden name after his father was taken away by the Serb paramilitary forces at the start of the war. Then, when the Bosniak army took hold of Sanski Most, they were exiled along with the rest of the Serb population. He did not then leave Bosnia completely until much later and then for reasons connected to work and life opportunities. So Diasporas of all generations and ethnicities have a multitude of stories and reasons for leaving the country and even if their reason for leaving the country was economic, it does not mean that they did not have their own experiences of wartime displacement.

The citizens of Prijedor municipality are impacted heavily by the high rate of unemployment in Bosnia. Educated citizens or skilled workers move away as soon as possible to improve their employment possibilities and earning potential. As political scientist, Sumantra Bose (2002, p. 37) indicates in his research on post-Dayton Bosnia, a 2000 UNDP survey showed that '62% of young Bosnians, frustrated by sub-standard education facilities and the prospect of joblessness after graduating, expressed the desire to leave the country if they could.' The 2013 unemployment rates in Bosnia are listed as between 27.5% and 31.6% (Agencija za Statistiku BiH Website, 2014), and like many municipalities in the region, Prijedor is plagued by corruption, political favouritism, unemployment and debt. In a 2004 UNDP report (2004, p. 7), it was stated that:

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<sup>82</sup> Field notes from conversation with Darko (anonymised): Member of the Prijedor diaspora (30/08/2014)

Economic crisis has been caused by failed privatisation, corruption, stagnated production or bankruptcy of the main local industries, a high number of unemployed, a long-lasting embargo on foreign donations imposed onto municipality by the so-called Lautenberg Amendment (1998-2002) and the lack of development strategy on the RS and state level.

This ties in to clashes between permanent residents and the visiting diaspora. Whilst one might expect clashes between ethnic groups, the diaspora season passes generally without incident in Prijedor. In fact, any friction is mostly economic, rather than ethnic. There is a significant financial inequality between the diaspora and home citizens, and little sensitivity regarding this issue. I raise this point to establish that this is yet another example in which tensions between people within such a controversial space are not as clear cut as simply existing along ethnic lines. It is much more driven by financial concerns, which was noted by people I met with in other towns and cities in Bosnia: ‘Everyone gets along until it becomes about money.’<sup>83</sup> Many disputes over ethnicity in the region are at the funding/political level. The diaspora, both Serb and Muslim, is largely unsympathetic to the dire economic situation of those living in Prijedor permanently, and so they arrive with expensive cars and large amounts of money. This is similar across the former Yugoslavia and even dates back to the Yugoslav period, when many citizens went abroad to work in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, coming back in high-end cars and building over-the-top homes back in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. The term used even today is taken from German: *Gastarbeiter*, which means ‘guestworker’. This term is still used derogatively by citizens in the former Yugoslavia to refer to economic migrants. So there is resentment towards the ‘diaspora napada’,<sup>84</sup> but it is largely connected to money and the fact that diaspora populations managed to escape.

Otherwise, interactions are largely friendly. At the most positive level of analysis, many people are reunited with pre-war friends that are impossible to visit due to the cost of travel for locals, and socialising is accordingly mixed. And at the most negative, citizens are apathetic to the presence of difference. If we consider

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<sup>83</sup> Field notes from meeting with Sjur Hamre: UWC student and SAF Mostar participant (21/05/2014)

<sup>84</sup> diaspora attack: a term used often by my friends in the town of Prijedor in reference to the flash cars and show-off behaviour. Not against faith or ethnicity. Many of their friends in the diaspora are Muslims

Oberschall's (2010, p. 6) point that 'people tend to talk politics within homogenous clusters', then regardless of physical encounters with (ethnic) difference, these differences are not necessarily engaged with. This means that nationalists and religious fanatics on all sides, whilst not overtly aggressive towards each other, would tend to interact with their own groups even if physical proximity to others is close. However, this also means that it is important to attend to the other things people organise around in Prijedor and Bosnia more broadly, such as work and unemployment issues, sport, age, and in the case of my research, art. This is not to erase problems of ethnicity or to pretend that they do not exist, but when studying fragmentation in post-Dayton Bosnia, it is important to include multiple analyses of the spaces and things people organise around in order to recognise the voices left out of standard narratives.

### *Tolerance and the West*

Based on my experience in Bosnia over an eighteen-month/two-year period, but Prijedor specifically, inter-ethnic violence was minimal to non-existent. In an area with such a violent, ethnicised history, I believe the more important question is not 'does ethnic intolerance still exist in Bosnia?'; but rather, 'what standards of multiculturalism and tolerance do we place on postwar societies?' Perhaps difference is encountered more regularly in, for example, the UK, but so too are incidences of hate crimes. Based on averages from 2013/14, the rate of recorded hate crimes in Bosnia was eight per one hundred thousand persons (OSCE - ODIHR, 2015), whereas in England and Wales it was two per thousand persons (Corcoran et al., 2015) for the same period. Of course this can be affected by reporting and recording methods, which are possibly more advanced in the UK. However, even in the UK, methods are not perfect so the figures may be much higher in both countries. Even so, if we accept these figures as accurate or with only slight variation, we see that the level of hate crime in Bosnia is either equal to or significantly lower than in England and Wales.

Additionally, studies of demographics, housing, economics, and education have demonstrated that even societies viewed as broadly multicultural are in fact more segregated or problematic than they seem (Glynn, 2010; Phillips, 2007; Spell, 2014; Swanton, 2010). From historic patterns of forced segregation to keep new migrants apart from existing populations (Glynn, 2010), to self-segregation to maintain

individual cultures (Johnson, 2013), even cities such as London reveal themselves to be more fragmented when examined at smaller-scale demographic levels. This is a further reflection of the Balkanist discourse outlined by Todorova (2009), as it demonstrates a projection of unrealised Western ideals onto the Balkan “Other”. Balkan forms of intolerance are viewed as more “wild” and unacceptable than their Western counterparts. This highlights questions for researchers of how we view tolerance and subsequently, fragmentation in post-conflict societies. As Campbell (1999) notes, there is a degree of hypocrisy amongst the international community in terms of the notion of multi-ethnicity or tolerance. The international community favoured nationalist goals to establish peace but now criticises the same policies it helped to entrench. I would extend this concept of hypocrisy to include the notion that the degree of multi-ethnic tolerance expected of Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly is of a higher level than that which exists in Western societies.

As outlined in my literature review, political scientist Wendy Brown (2008, p. 6) has written extensively on the concept of tolerance as discourse used in ‘the legitimization of imperial state action.’ She outlines how tolerance in the twenty-first century has been viewed as the preserve of the West and ‘draws from and entwines postcolonial, liberal and neoliberal reasoning’ (Brown, 2008, p. 202). Although she writes about the twenty-first century War on Terror, similar logic can be applied to an examination of pre-, during and postwar perceptions of tolerance in Bosnia. The colonial element of tolerance discourse is also interesting to explore and links to the concept of Balkanism developed by Todorova (2009), Goldsworthy (2013) and others.

Political geography literature on the breakup of Yugoslavia (Campbell, 1999; Jeffrey, 2013; Ó Tuathail, 1996) has demonstrated the ways that Balkanist views of the region framed international perceptions of the conflict. However, there were more generic colonial elements to international involvement, though not often framed in these terms. In their article *Bosnia and the revival of US hegemony*, Petras and Vieux (1996) argue that US dealings in Bosnia during the war of the nineties were part of a post-Cold War strategy to reassert the place of the US and NATO after the Iron Curtain. More importantly, they implicate international states and actors more broadly in a way that pits the US against Europe in what economist Carl-Ulrik Schierup (1999) has also described as the *Scramble for the Balkans*. This depicts a colonial-esque struggle for



territory in the former Yugoslavia or, in this case, territorial and financial interest. Most actors had their reasons, for example ‘Germany has had religious and political ties with Croatia [and Slovenia] ever since the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire’ (Webb et al., 1996, p. 184), and ‘Russia has had traditional ties with Serbia, partly stemming from its common ground of Orthodox Christian religion and Slavic culture’ (Webb et al., 1996, p. 185). However at the time, because of its ‘substantial economic dependence on the United States and Western Europe, Russia ... unreservedly backed the EC- and UN-led peace process’ (Webb et al., 1996, p. 185), whilst still making its support for Serbia known. In dividing up the Republics, Petras and Vieux (1996, p. 23) state that the US was left with Bosnia and made it their pet project, constantly blocking European peace negotiations and then leaving the country stranded ‘once the European leadership in the region had been broken.’ The main point of including this in my discussion is to demonstrate that international involvement in the region has been framed in a neocolonial way since before the breakup of Yugoslavia.

The actions of foreign parties during the break-up of Yugoslavia have been approached creatively by regional groups, such as Laibach. Their 1994 album NATO covers popular songs from East and West dealing with war. As Alexei Monroe (2005, p. 240) describes, by combining the symbols of NATO and popular culture ‘Laibach recapitulate NATO as an ideological regime, and link the economic system it represents to pop culture.’ The expansion of both systems was highlighted by the increased militarisation of this logic in Laibach’s work. Through this hyper-militarised symbolism, Laibach ‘condemns Western powers under NATO for insufficiently implementing measures to mitigate Bosnia’s war atrocities, suggesting that sustaining the war provided increased strategic and economic benefits for them’ (Sombatpoonsiri, 2015, p. 25). This not only connects the critique of neocolonial practices in Yugoslavia to creative practices, but again highlights the use of humour in the art practices of the former Yugoslavia. By overidentifying with military and Western symbols, Laibach created a series of ridiculous songs that simultaneously disrupted perceptions of Western benevolence in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

The reason I am discussing the neocolonial conditions during the breakup of Yugoslavia is because they have laid the foundations for a more benign aid

dependency relationship between the countries of the former Yugoslavia and the West (Jeffrey, 2013; Sivac-Bryant, 2016). As Jeffrey (2007, p. 269) notes, the protracted presence of NGOs in Bosnia has led to a nanny approach to Bosnia and its citizens, and assumptions that they do not know what is best for them. This in turn has led to limited links with locals and the real needs of communities. Additional to this, in her book *Remaking Kozarac*, Sebina Sivac-Bryant (2016, p. 2) notes how ‘the work of international humanitarian interventions often neither builds nor encourages agency, capacity or ingenuity among the people they want to help.’ Her research deals with returns and rebuilding processes in Kozarac, where international involvement was confused and ineffectual. In one of the most successful and unexpected sites of refugee return in Bosnia, the refugees themselves were key in implementing strategies (Sivac-Bryant, 2016), most notably the 17<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade of the Bosnian Army, which was a unit made up of refugees and the diaspora more broadly, and local women’s organisations. As Sivac-Bryant (2016) notes, this was more in spite of rather than due to international involvement.

International perceptions of communities and their needs have also blocked cultural initiatives, which have gone on to be successful despite these blocks. The Sarajevo-based NGO Akcija ran a project in 2015 to reopen Zemaljski Muzej, or the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I will discuss this more in the following chapter but relevant to this discussion is the conflict they had with US AID financiers. From 2008-2012, staff at Zemaljski were working unpaid due to its critical financial situation. Following this, when it was no longer sustainable to keep it open, it closed for another three years. This was due in part to the funding issues that have plagued many of the capital’s institutions, but also a contentious legal situation that blocked, or rather saved, anybody from claiming responsibility for it. Akcija wanted to work with the staff to force the government to commit to creating a more secure legal and financial situation for the museum to reopen. The conflict with US AID was that they were unhappy with cooperation with the museum staff because they viewed them as criminals due to the fact that they were the ones who directly initiated the closure. The workers may have initiated the closure but this was after three years without pay and only when they simply could not afford to keep it open to the public, plus they continued to protect the artifacts unpaid after the closure. For Akcija it was essential to build up trust and collaboration with the workers and a photography project

documenting the contribution of each was initially meant to be used as advertising for their protest action. First, US AID had a disagreement about logos. Akcija wanted no logos at all but US AID insisted that their logo must be on all promotional material. So the photos were planned to be used as an opening exhibition in Zemaljski instead. When US AID realised that the exhibition was comprised of photos of the “criminal” workers, they wanted all logos pulled so the exhibition has to go ahead without supporting materials.<sup>85</sup> This example demonstrates the disconnect between the international community and local struggles. This approach stems partly from a desire to keep the peace with the ethno-nationalist governments in charge of the country, but also an assumption of knowing what the country needs more than citizens themselves.

### *Artistic spaces of difference*

Projects such as the returnees of Kozarac and art projects and collaborations demonstrate further encounters with difference that work positively against ethno-political divides, and open up the region to broader audiences and experiences. Annual art events in Prijedor alone, such as *Ars Kozara* and Prijedor Grad Murala, have brought participants from across the globe, as well as the former Yugoslavia more specifically. Since 2007, these events have included artists from:

Bosnia (Banja Luka, Prijedor, Sarajevo, Trebinje, Mostar, Bosanski Brod)

Hungary (Budapest)

Romania (Bucharest)

Serbia (Krupanj, Novi Sad, Belgrade, Obrenovac, Lukićevo)

Croatia (Zagreb, Labin)

France (Paris)

China (Beijing)

Brazil (Vitória)

Italy (Carnate, Trento)

In artistic practices especially, difference, near or far, is viewed positively as a way to exchange ideas and explore new approaches. In countries such as Bosnia, and especially outside of the capital Sarajevo, the opportunity to meet with people from

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<sup>85</sup> Based on notes from interviews with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016 and 27/08/2015)

different countries and of different ethnicities is valued even more because postwar, this is not a common experience. A feeling of isolation took hold of artists during and immediately following the war.<sup>86</sup> For example, Veso Sovilj's 2005 work *Mousetrap* (see figure 8.1) deals directly with this disconnection. Sovilj had been part of an important Bosnian art group (Group of Four) during the Yugoslav period however, the war severed connections between them and wider artistic circles, leaving Sovilj and other artists feeling isolated. *Mousetrap* is a large scale metal sculpture of a mousetrap, over-sized to be large enough for a human, thus positioning Sovilj as the mouse and the borders entrenched by war as the trap that has kept people in the former Yugoslavia isolated from both each other and the world.



*Figure 8.1: Mousetrap, Veso Sovilj (2005), Banja Luka Museum of Contemporary Art, February 18 2014*

Today artists and cultural workers speak of the dangers of isolation because the postwar situation in Bosnia, until recently, restricted the movement of people through visa requirements: 'because many people were denied travel, and isolation keeps people backwards.'<sup>87</sup> Today, the international isolation is perhaps felt more strongly

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<sup>86</sup> Notes from tour with Žana Vukičević: curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Banja Luka (18/02/2014)

<sup>87</sup> Notes from meeting with Berislav Blagojević: author, Banja Luka (19/02/2014)

than the regional isolation.<sup>88</sup> In other words, Republika Srpska citizens do not feel isolated from the Federation at an everyday level and vice versa, or even the former Yugoslavia more broadly. Instead they feel cut off from the rest of the world, which had previously, under the Yugoslav system, been very open to them.

In terms of addressing the isolation of Bosnian artists, an examination of the participant nations in *Ars Kozara* can also be conceptualised as a way of opening up these spaces of encounter, without this being its primary goal. This temporary space of encounter is also important for people external to the artists themselves. As one of the local visitors and occasional volunteer for the project explained to me, *Ars Kozara* is really important to a lot of young people in the municipality because it is one of the few chances to meet people from other countries, even ex-Yugoslav countries, because Prijedor is lacking in appeal as a tourist site today.<sup>89</sup> This is in dramatic contrast to its former position in Yugoslavia, when Kozara was a key part of the memorial tourism that was popular in the country.

The relatively homogenous cultures in Bosnia are due in part to the wars of the nineties, but also because of the shift in status of ex-Yugoslav countries. During the Yugoslav period, specifically Tito's Yugoslavia, the opportunity to travel was greater, as was tourism to the region. Not only this, but due to connections with non-aligned countries, students and workers came from around the world to live in the region. Formed in Belgrade in 1961, the non-aligned movement was eventually made up of around one hundred member states. The movement 'took the form of resistance to division of the world into blocs and bloc alignment' (Kardelj, 1979, p. 141) during the Cold War, and presented a significant challenge to the bloc mentality of division and polarisation. However, as Kardelj (1979, p. 141) notes, it was also a 'reflection of a much longer socio-historical tendency.' Here he is referring to the liberation struggles of the various member states that made up the non-aligned movement, the perception of them as "Third World", and the solidarity that built out of these shared positionalities.

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<sup>88</sup> Based on field notes from preliminary research trip 15/02-22/02/2014 and meeting with Berislav Blagojević: author, Banja Luka (19/02/2014)

<sup>89</sup> Field notes from conversation with Dejan (anonymised): railway worker and Ars Kozara visitor/volunteer (23/08/2014)

Tito's Yugoslavia played a strong role in its establishment and agreements between non-aligned members meant a steady flow of people between countries for work and travel, many choosing Yugoslavia. This led to an even more multicultural society that was impacted heavily by the crumbling political environment and subsequent breakup of Yugoslavia. It was not only the breakup of Yugoslavia that ended this cultural exchange. Although the non-aligned movement still exists in name, its position after the end of the Cold War was significantly reduced and confused. The connections and migrations dwindled along with its position in global politics. Now migrations in the former Yugoslavia are largely migrations away from its various successor states. This has both positive and negative consequences. The negative effect is the massive brain drain that it has on countries such as Bosnia, which have already suffered the major shocks of post-socialist and postwar transition. The positives can be seen in the art world, where the migrations of artists can increase international exposure for Bosnian art, as well as create broader networks and opportunities to experience different working environments.

This section has identified spaces, including artistic spaces, in which encounters with difference do actually take place naturally in what is often supposed to be a fragmented country. Just as anthropologist Tone Bringa (1995) argues that Bosnia, like any place, cannot be romanticised as an historically harmonious multicultural society, I argue that it should not be framed in terms of its violent past either. I have demonstrated the complex layers of inter-ethnic relations in one of the more controversial regions of the country, as well as the international isolation felt by artists and citizens, and the way that artistic networks are reworking some of these problems. It is essential to recognise these multiple layers of isolation, fragmentation and integration. Temporary encounters with difference must be attended to, as well as the broader fragmenting of the former Yugoslavia away from the rest of Europe and the world. I have also shown the need to include explorations of the non-ethnicised categories that people do in fact organise around, including art, in order to broaden our understanding of the region.

### **Temporary permanence: building a framework for lasting cooperation**

Now that I have outlined the alternative spaces of difference that artists are creating through collaborative projects and events, I will assess another issue linked to temporality, and that is the question of networks and their sustainability. Many artists in Bosnia form and work in collectives due to institutional limitations, such as limited exhibition spaces and the perceived corruption and nepotism surrounding formal institutions. This has the benefit of increasing opportunities, support, networks and spaces for art in Bosnia. However, a potential critique of these networks and projects is that they often disappear or reduce their activities after a certain amount of time. My research demonstrates that such networks require an analysis that includes both their work and their influence on the evolving system of art activities in Bosnia. Some significant groups in Bosnia, such as Abart (Mostar) and Protok (Banja Luka), have all but disappeared, whereas others, such as Tač.ka (Prijedor) and Crvena (Sarajevo), continue. Their continued existence is uncertain, but the fact that there are always new collectives and projects appearing to continue the work and ethos of their predecessors makes sustainability questions more complex. I demonstrate that it is not helpful, or possible to consider any one group as central to the maintenance of artistic networks. Instead we should consider the role of art collectives in laying the foundations for future groups and young artists, offering formative experiences for continued progress towards a more normalised system of cultural production.

Stephen Graham (2010) encourages greater collaboration between groups to strengthen 'countergeographies' to what he sees as the increased 'militarization of cities' in the post-9/11 world. Similar to Brown's (2008) discussion of the increased use of tolerance discourse to legitimise state violence abroad, Graham (2010) believes that security concerns post-9/11 have been used to increase divisions, surveillance and violence at home and abroad. He believes that there are countergeographic strategies emerging to reverse or disrupt these processes, of which art is key:

(a) challenge is to make connections and interdependencies visible – those webs of exploitation, affiliation, dependence, and hospitality which bind urban life in Western cities with that of cities elsewhere in the world much more tightly than cultures of war-mongering can ever do (Graham, 2010, p. 353)

Connections between artists in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly highlight countergeographies by making visible these webs on a more regional scale. Even if individual groups are ephemeral, something that Graham (2010) critiques, the networks they produce contribute to lasting countergeographies of Bosnia, highlighting connections rather than divisions. It is not necessarily positives that connect artists and citizens of Bosnia more broadly, but rather shared obstacles to the functioning of daily life. However, by laying bare these shared problems and the causes of said problems that have created divisions (ethno-nationalist politics and strategies), not only is the collective situation of citizens highlighted, but also the benefits of shared solutions outside of these divisive frameworks.

An examination of art collectives in postwar Bosnia shows that some no longer exist, some are on the verge of extinction, some remain, and some are emerging. There is nothing special about these patterns because it is a natural cycle internationally as well as regionally. Although the dissolution of collectives could be viewed as failure or giving up, the networks that build around groups remain and new groups emerge to continue and build on the general ethos of their predecessors. Below (figure 8.2) is a table of art collectives that have formed in Bosnia since 2000, along with their operative dates and locations:

Name	Location	Dates Active	Additional Comments
Protok	Banja Luka	2005-2011	
namaTRE.ba	Trebinje	2006-	Changed focus of activities
Tač.ka	Prijedor	2007-	Changed focus of activities
Abart	Mostar	2008-2012	
Crvena	Sarajevo	2010-	

*Figure 8.2: Table of art collectives in Bosnia 2000-Present*

I will now outline the activities and aims of these groups, with the exception of Tač.ka, as I have already explored their work in great depth in earlier chapters.



Established initially in 2005 as an alternative art space in Banja Luka, Protok went on to organise SpaPort (2008-2013), one of the first postwar annual international art exhibitions. From 2008 to 2010, they also headed up the project 'Revival of the Local Art Scene' in collaboration with the Swiss Cultural Programme in the Western Balkans. The aim was to create a dialogue between artists and institutions, and to create more opportunities for Bosnian artists both regionally and abroad. The strategy for doing so involved '[e]ducation, exhibitions, and providing organisational support to young artists' (Swiss Cultural Programme, 2008). This was one of the first regional initiatives developed outside of official institutions to expand artistic opportunities and exposure, and although Protok have effectively ceased activities, there have been others with shared goals and motivations to continue the networks they established.

Tač.ka's early development, for example, mirrored the concerns of Protok and the shared problem of institutional limitations. Noticing a high number of Prijedor graduates from the Art Academy in Banja Luka with very little opportunity to push the boundaries and be critical with their work, the idea was to create a forum and a platform for this.<sup>90</sup> With limited space to explore and exhibit, land art became a good conceptual framework in which to work on these issues: and so the *Ars Kozara* project was born in 2007.<sup>91</sup> This continued the creation of alternative geographies and politics for art initiated by Protok, where the aim was to recognise collective problems entrenched in the system from above, and to work together towards shared solutions. Artists from the two groups have collaborated with each other and subsequent collectives that have formed around Bosnia. Where Protok opened up the dialogue and institutional spaces, Tač.ka created new frameworks for exhibiting and collaboration.

A shift in Protok's activities that also resonates with Tač.ka and other Bosnian art collectives was its development in 'strengthening (Protok) into a supportive platform for education and exchange experience about new technologies' (Swiss Cultural Programme, 2008). The focus on new technologies and education is directly related to what was, at that time, considered to be the outdated teaching methods at the academies, in relation to the international scene:

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Mladen Bundalo: artist and founding member of Tač.ka (07/03/2014)

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Mladen Bundalo: artist and founding member of Tač.ka (07/03/2014)

at the art academy in Banja Luka you learnt how to make a drawing and painting, and ... it was just paintings and drawings from the last century, you know? (Laughs) I joke but it's partly true. I mean we have a few professors who did what they wanted outside of this structure. But only a few.<sup>92</sup>

This is a quote from Mladen Bundalo, one of the founding members of Tač.ka. Protok were one of the first independent collectives to tackle these questions, but Tač.ka and others were not far behind. In the 2011 edition of *Ars Kozara*, multimedia approaches were incorporated into the programme. This was partly due to financial costs, being able to support more artists' attendance at the project by cutting the production materials, but also to expand the parameters of engagement.<sup>93</sup>

The shift to new media in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly has expanded since the early 2000s because it has both increased the possibilities to produce work through the reduction of materials and costs, something that is vital to the situation of Bosnian artists, but also in connecting the work of young artists to broader global artistic practices. This trend was taken further in the work of namaTREba from Trebinje. namaTREba still exists as a biennial video art festival, founded and run by artist Igor Bošnjak since 2006. The group aimed to open up artistic possibilities to new media and video art projects:

The name of the project "namaTRE.ba" which means "we need" is actually a pun or a wordplay. The very idea and the name of the project "we need in TREbinje" speaks volumes about how much we need an event of this kind. This is an event where we could see state-of-the-art world trends in short contemporary film, digital photography and video art (namaTREba, 2014).

As well as taking up the shared interest in expanding opportunities and media available to young artists outlined by groups such as Tač.ka and Protok, Bošnjak has also collaborated with Tač.ka in several ways: he was a participant in the 2009 edition of *Ars Kozara* and a member of the selection panel in 2014. namaTREba itself has only reduced its activities in terms of frequency, shifting from an annual to biennial

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Mladen Bundalo: artist and founding member of Tač.ka (07/03/2014)

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Nemanja Čado: artist and Tač.ka coordinator (21/02/2014)

event. The reasons for their ability to maintain activities are multiple: Bošnjak is a professor at the Art Academy in Trebinje, which means that he has the support and infrastructure of the university, but also a strong connection to the new generations of students coming through the Academy. Additional to this, the project is very specific in its focus on video and new media art. Having a more specific focus can also make activities easier to maintain and lowers financial costs, since the space and materials needed to display video works are significantly lower than classic and mixed media art productions.

The Abart collective focused less on opening up new media approaches to Bosnia artists and audiences, and more on engaging with trends in socially engaged/participatory art practices and the use of public space. They were also the group that inspired me to research alternative geographies, politics and identities through contemporary art practices in Bosnia; and they put me in contact with Tač.ka and Crvena members, broadening my research sites and approach. Formed in Mostar in 2008, the group did a number of memory-work projects that engaged with the space(s) of Mostar. These projects included: *Art in Divided Cities* (2009/10), *Football - a Metaphor for Life?*<sup>94</sup> (2010), *(Re)collecting Mostar* (2011), and *Amnezion* (2012). All of these projects were heavily research-based and blurred the lines between art and activism. However, in light of their themes, I will focus on *Art in Divided Cities* and *(Re)collecting Mostar*.

*Art in Divided Cities* was a collaboration between three cities (Mostar, Beirut and Kosovo Mitrovica) in three stages. The first exhibition in Mostar (*A Guide to Divided Cities*) focused on deconstructing ideas of division and was more a socio-political-historical investigation of all three cities than an art project. However, all actors involved were artists and cultural workers, adding an interdisciplinary approach to these topics. The second exhibition in Mostar (*Interspace*) included the work of Bosnian artists with a focus on the theme of borders. And the final stage was the *Festival of Art in Divided Cities*, which focused on encounters and engagements with artists and cultural workers from the participating cities.

*(Re)collecting Mostar* was very much a follow-up to this, with a specific focus on

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<sup>94</sup> *Nogomet metafora života*

Mostar as a divided city. The project involved gathering together students and artists, and using social media to connect with Mostar natives no longer living in the city to create an open archive of memories and maps (Hampton 2011), those often excluded from official discourse. As I have discussed previously, Mostar is a particularly divided city in terms of its political structure, with the line between Croat and Muslim areas running roughly along the path of the Neretva River. This is a symbolic border that people move across daily but separate school systems, cultural institutes and public services were developed along the divide. By using ideas of cognitive mapping of the private experience of the city's geography and personal histories, Abart were able to challenge the idea of divides at the everyday level and question the idea of fixed ethno-borders. Cognitive mapping is based on individual and mental representations of places and phenomena. In controversial contexts such as Bosnia, it offers an alternative way of studying regional geographies.

The project is a good example of Graham's (2010, p. 368) exploration of countergeographies, as it worked through collaboration to expose connections, 'problematizing and undermining [the] performances, spectacles, circuits, rituals and obfuscations' of local politics. It was also one of the few art projects in Bosnia to receive UN funding, however members of the group admit that the funding brought with it additional pressures to have ethnic quotas and frame their project in ways that fit a reconciliation narrative.<sup>95</sup> Whilst it was their goal to open out perceptions of the city to everyone, they did not necessarily want to frame or limit this in terms of any broader goals or quotas. This is a direct example of the ways in which socially engaged or participatory art practices can blur the boundaries between art and social projects to the benefit of neither goal (Bishop, 2012), but also the ways that international donors miss the point and needs of local projects. The activities of Abart ended in 2012, as the momentum was lost and members moved on to other things.<sup>96</sup> Perhaps this indicates a somewhat unsustainable quality in these forms of art practice too.

A group that has managed to achieve a great deal of success and (so far) sustainability

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<sup>95</sup> Research notes on meeting with Mela Žuljević: project coordinator and designer of the Abart collective, Mostar 2008-2012 (25/05/2014)

<sup>96</sup> Research notes on meeting with Mela Žuljević: project coordinator and designer of the Abart collective, Mostar 2008-2012 (25/05/2014)

is the Crvena Art Association. Established as a feminist art collective in Sarajevo 2010, their aim was to increase the profile of female artists and feminist approaches in Bosnia, but has since increased to include research projects and curating the 54<sup>th</sup> October Salon in Belgrade (2013). The October Salon is one of the biggest annual art events in the former Yugoslavia. Established in 1960, the form of the event has shifted with political changes. For the last decade, however, the format has been to select a different curator and space each year. In 2013, the curatorial team was Crvena, the location was a former Yugoslav department store (Kluz), and the theme and title was *Nobody belongs here more than you*.<sup>97</sup> The choice of Crvena – a feminist art collective from Sarajevo – and the theme, which focused on feminism and the politics of the everyday, was a big step for a regional exhibition with such a large reputation. It demonstrates not only the reach that Bosnian art collectives have had in connecting beyond ethnic and state borders, but also the success of Crvena in cementing themselves as one of the most significant groups in the Bosnian cultural scene. Members Nela Hasanbegović and Lana Čmajčanin also participated in *Ars Kozara*'s 2009 edition. The point of mentioning this is to demonstrate the connections between the networks established by Bosnian art collectives, and the opportunities and lasting connections they build. The following section will go on to expand the alternative regional maps of artists through their work and collaborations. But it is important to note here the networks that lead to that.

Whilst funding is a sustainability factor for those collectives that no longer exist or exist in different forms, it is only one of many. With Protok, for example, as founder Radenko Milak became more established and started a family, it simply became more difficult to maintain.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Abart members went on to further study and other projects, gradually becoming less active as a collective.<sup>99</sup> However, this does not mean that they do not still collaborate with or help the networks that they established, and as artist Mladen Miljanović comments:

It's natural. That's part of the culture, you know. Some plants succeed to grow up and some... the sun burns them down. And it's the same with artists but all

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<sup>97</sup> *Niko ne pripada tu više nego ti*

<sup>98</sup> Online communication with Radenko Milak: artist and Protok founder (20/02/2014)

<sup>99</sup> Research notes on meeting with Mela Žuljević: project coordinator and designer of the Abart collective, Mostar 2008-2012 (25/05/2014)

in all I think that there always should be people sharing these ideas – support.<sup>100</sup>

As I have demonstrated, there always are these support networks for sharing ideas and alternative frameworks for the cultural sphere, even if individual groups fade out of action. I have not mentioned some of the newer collectives that are emerging, such as Rizba (2015), because they are still in their infancy. However, the emergence of new collectives demonstrates potential for further activity and collaboration.

A key reason for the collapse of collectives outside of financial concerns is the migration of artists away from their home towns or Bosnia altogether. Additional to the broad theoretical problems of socially engaged art practices outlined in my literature review, there exists a practical problem in the specific context of Bosnia, which is that there are heavy expectations placed on those involved to stay. There is an assumption that if one is engaged, one must want to stay and conversely, if one wants to leave, one cannot be truly engaged. In Bosnia the reality is that many activists and artists are both engaged *and* want to leave. The two are not mutually exclusive. Talking with Tač.ka members for example, what they say can often seem contradictory. On the one hand they engage with difficult social questions and work hard to create alternative spaces in which art can take place. But at the same time, half of the members live elsewhere now and the other half are very open about the fact that they would leave Bosnia if they could.<sup>101</sup> In discussions with a local (Prijeđor) NGO group, this contradiction was explained perfectly. One member commented to me that it really pains him to see the problems in Bosnian society and it is important for him to try to push for change. However at the same time, he is only one man with one life and there comes a point when one has to choose what really constitutes living.<sup>102</sup> This attitude may seem like giving up but I think the choice to stay in Bosnia is easier for external commentators who are not stuck there. Just as the concept of engagement is complex, so too is the role of geographical location in this.

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Mladen Miljanović: artist, professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy and Bosnian Pavilion representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale (09/07/2014)

<sup>101</sup> The members that live outside of Prijeđor and/or Bosnia are still involved in the planning of Ars Kozara and return every year for the event itself

<sup>102</sup> Field notes from meeting with Mirko (anonymised): member of local Prijeđor NGO (21/02/2014)

It is not easy to live in Prijedor, let alone differ from the norm of social apathy.<sup>103</sup> Unemployment and poverty mean that most people live with their parents, lacking the space to grow as adults and explore. I had many conversations with people there about the frustrations associated with this that for ethical reasons cannot be discussed in more detail, but are important to note in terms of highlighting how common the issue of space (or a lack thereof) is. Of course, this can be compared to the post-2008 crisis environment of the UK and other European countries, but that would be unhelpful. The scale of the problem in Prijedor and Bosnia more broadly is far greater and stretches back to the war period, affecting adults up to the age of 45. The situation is heightened by the fact that it can feel very socially claustrophobic there.<sup>104</sup> It is therefore understandable that people would search for opportunities abroad, especially to escape a system that is viewed as nepotistic, elitist and corrupt.

In collectives such as Crvena and Tač.ka, there are members who are still involved but have migrated abroad. Nela Hasanbegović, a member of the Crvena collective, explained to me the benefits of this migratory work pattern within groups. For her it was good that artists could leave and come back with alternative frames of reference for work because then the other members of the collective are exposed to those inputs from abroad as well, and they are not limited to one place, even if physically they are.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the head curator of the National Gallery, Maja Abdamerović, stated that:

I strongly believe that every young person should go somewhere to see what it's like to live in a foreign country, to learn languages, meet people... Other cultures and all that. And if they feel like coming back they should come back. That's the right way to do it. To travel as much as possible.<sup>106</sup>

We also discussed how these migrations not only add new layers to the work of Bosnian artists, but also provide international promotion for the Bosnian scene because 'they are still Bosnian artists ... They don't live here but they are part of the

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Sladjana Miljević: head of the Projeetto Prijedor NGO (17/06/2014)

<sup>104</sup> Recurring theme in field notes June 2014-September 2015

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Nela Hasanbegović: Artist, Ars Kozara participant and Crvena member (21/06/2014)

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Maja Abdamerović: head curator of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (14/08/2014)

cultural/art scene.’<sup>107</sup> Not everybody is so relaxed about the migration of artists, however, though generally most agree with the benefits of travel. Borjana Mrda told me that whilst she likes to travel, she believes that she could not live anywhere else.<sup>108</sup> Admittedly this position is related to her work because the themes of family and intimacy are central to her practice and she feels she has to remain close to them.<sup>109</sup> However Mladen Miljanović, Bosnian representative at the Venice Biennale 2013, views staying within the country as a kind of duty towards future generations:

The benefit is that you are one of the few examples showing people that it’s possible. It’s possible to go from the shitty village where I’m from and to come to Banja Luka without any money in your pocket. Without any support from family. To finish your studies and develop your career on the basis of your work. To develop that work in some kind of regional context ... [but also] some kind of international context.<sup>110</sup>

Whilst this is an admirable position to take, it also comes from a position of privilege of being one of the most successful artists working in Bosnia today with a day job as a professor at the Art Academy. So I believe that whilst Borjana is understanding of the reasons she has been able to stay in Bosnia – ‘For me it was lucky that I got a job (in the arts)’<sup>111</sup> – Miljanović adopts an almost self-righteous attitude to the issue of migration. For others both within and outside of Bosnia, meanwhile, it is viewed as possible to effect change and enrich the system by bringing new experiences from other countries.<sup>112</sup>

The combined problems of financial and geographical constraints has certainly hit Tač.ka. In 2007 they had eight permanent members, slowly reduced to four, increased to five, and now only two. Founding members Igor Sovilj and Mladen Bundalo moved

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with Maja Abdamerović: head curator of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (14/08/2014)

<sup>108</sup> Field notes from visit to artist Borjana Mrda’s studio (09/07/2014)

<sup>109</sup> Field notes from visit to artist Borjana Mrda’s studio (09/07/2014)

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Mladen Miljanović: artist, professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy and Bosnian Pavilion representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale (09/07/2014)

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Borjana Mrda: artist and professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy (17/06/2014)

<sup>112</sup> Based on meetings and interviews with Igor Sovilj: artist and founding member of Tač.ka (30/08/2014); Interview with Nela Hasanbegović: Artist, Ars Kozara participant and Crvena member (21/06/2014); Interview with Maja Abdamerović: head curator of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (14/08/2014)



abroad to Berlin and France/Belgium respectively; and Dajan Špirić only moved to Banja Luka, but work commitments prevent him from being very active. This leaves Nemanja Čađo and Dragan Indić as the only members still based in Prijedor, and much of the work falls on coordinator Čađo. The others are still symbolically members of Tač.ka, but their physical involvement in the group's activities becomes less and less over the years. This led the group to switch from working on multiple projects to focusing on one main event: *Ars Kozara*.

Even the singular focus on *Ars Kozara* has been a challenge at times though, with 2011 being a much-pared back edition and 2015 plagued by financial difficulties. For the first time ever, in 2015 Tač.ka was awarded funding from the Republika Srpska Ministry for Culture for the *Ars Kozara* project. The award of 13 000KM<sup>113</sup> (£5600) was a great achievement and in theory allowed them the luxury, for the first time, of not worrying too much about the finances of the project. However, the way this funding works is that it is awarded in the Spring and given at the end of the year. Therefore everything is done on an IOU basis, based on the assurance that the money will arrive. As of July 2016, they still had not received the money and only after an article was published in the regional paper Blic<sup>114</sup> (Lipovčić, 2016a) did the Ministry give in and pay the money they owed. As a follow-up article explains though, 'the money paid for *Ars Kozara* [does] not solve the problem'<sup>115</sup> (Lipovčić, 2016b). It is becoming increasingly difficult to work in a system that is so unprofessional and uninterested in supporting creative industry. Due to the financial problems caused by the delayed payment for 2015, *Ars Kozara* 2016 was cancelled, which followed the cancellation of two other creative festivals in Republika Srpska – *Kratkofil* (a short film festival) and *Flaster* (an audio-visual festival) – for similar reasons.

The fear is that *Ars Kozara* may become unsustainable in the future. But would their disappearance alter the impact of their work? I would argue that it does not. Firstly because Tač.ka and *Ars Kozara* have been one of the longest-running groups and projects, gathering together a large number of Bosnian artists and supporters, and acting as a platform for young artists outside of formal institutions. Of course the hope

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<sup>113</sup> KM is the local abbreviation for the Bosnian currency. It stands for 'Konvertibilna Marka'. Sometimes it is listed internationally as BAM, which stand for 'Bosnian Convertible Mark'

<sup>114</sup> An RS sister company of the Serbian paper of the same name

<sup>115</sup> Novac uplaćen za *Ars Kozaru* nije urešio probleme

is that they can sustain the group and the project, but the legacy that they have built is a significant step forward in the field of contemporary Bosnian art. In the case of collectives more broadly, it is the continuation of this legacy of progress and networking that is most important; that within or outside of collectives, artists are still collaborating beyond the lifespan of these groups to create alternative patterns for the future of art in Bosnia.

From the above we can see that some collectives and activities are unsustainable for various reasons. But this does not mean that the underlying connections and ethos that they embody are unsustainable. Overall we are left with the same number of art collectives working in Bosnia, and with their connection and outreach to upcoming generations of artists, the possibilities for future collectives are endless, despite a lack of institutional and financial support. My survey of art collectives and projects indicates that activities at a certain level tend to be unsustainable past a five-year period but also that they continue to be significant in ways that outlast them. Despite their hardships, they have laid the groundwork for a strong, regional community that is reworking the cultural map in Bosnia along lines of collective problems and shared solutions. The following section will explore these maps further, beyond the borders of Bosnia to the former Yugoslavia more broadly.

### **Balkart: beyond Bosnia**

This final section of the chapter deals with the broader networks that have built up around art in the former Yugoslavia. Just like cooperation within Bosnia, cooperation between ex-Yugoslav states is based around a necessity to increase the limited markets and exhibiting opportunities within individual states as much as possible, and the convenience of sharing the same or similar language, culture and history. Although a strong Yugoslav connection can be seen, I explore the concept of ‘Balkart’ as well. Balkart is a term coined by the magazine Kosovo 2.0 (Luci, 2013b), in a special edition on contemporary art practices in the former Yugoslavia (plus Albania). For the editors, Balkart is a space where the strength of a unified field and the similarities of the conditions of Balkan artists is acknowledged without erasing differences between individual states and artists (Luci, 2013b). In this section I will demonstrate the lasting connections in a country (Yugoslavia) that is viewed politically as dead. Additionally, I explore how these regional connections are used

practically to increase artistic exposure, but also how the work that emerges from them challenges Western perceptions of the region. Finally, I analyse how the term 'Balkart' might help to avoid making any simplistic claims that Yugoslavia still exists in the work, hopes and dreams of contemporary artists. By engaging with local scholarship and projects, I highlight the alternative narratives that have been left out of Western academic literature on Bosnia and Yugoslavia, in order to suggest new ways of analysing borders and networks, and artistic practices in the region.

Maintaining networks within the former Yugoslavia and more broadly Balkan regions is a way for artists to counter the Balkan stereotypes outlined by scholars such as Bakic-Hayden (1995), Goldsworthy (2013) and Todorova (2009), and the effects they have on art production and reception. Currently the impacts are that artists working outside of the 'core' regions of global influence are tied to their geographical contexts even more so than Western artists, and are expected to represent the global image of their countries. At the same time, they are kept outside of the core and limited in possibilities in terms of exhibiting and working internationally. In this research, I am referring to the core regions of global influence in relation to art. However, these core regions are mostly the same for politics, economics and knowledge production, and largely refer to Western Europe and North America. By recognising the problems faced by Balkan artists and unifying them under the label 'Balkart', artists are simultaneously widening their public and countering misconceptions of the region. They are acknowledging group stereotypes and subverting them for their own aims. By including local work on this topic, my research incorporates local knowledge into the wider literature on the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia, moving this forward by including the voices of those currently being talked about rather than to.

Whilst I mostly focus on the connections operating between ex-Yugoslav countries, I argue that applying a broader Balkan/Southeast Europe framework is important to avoid certain traps. Even outside of the former Yugoslavia there exist similarities in the marginalisation processes facing artists and citizens, and by employing a broader framework, I can avoid any reductive claims that Yugoslavia still exists or perceptions of my research as suggesting so. What follows is an analysis of these connections in Bosnia and beyond.

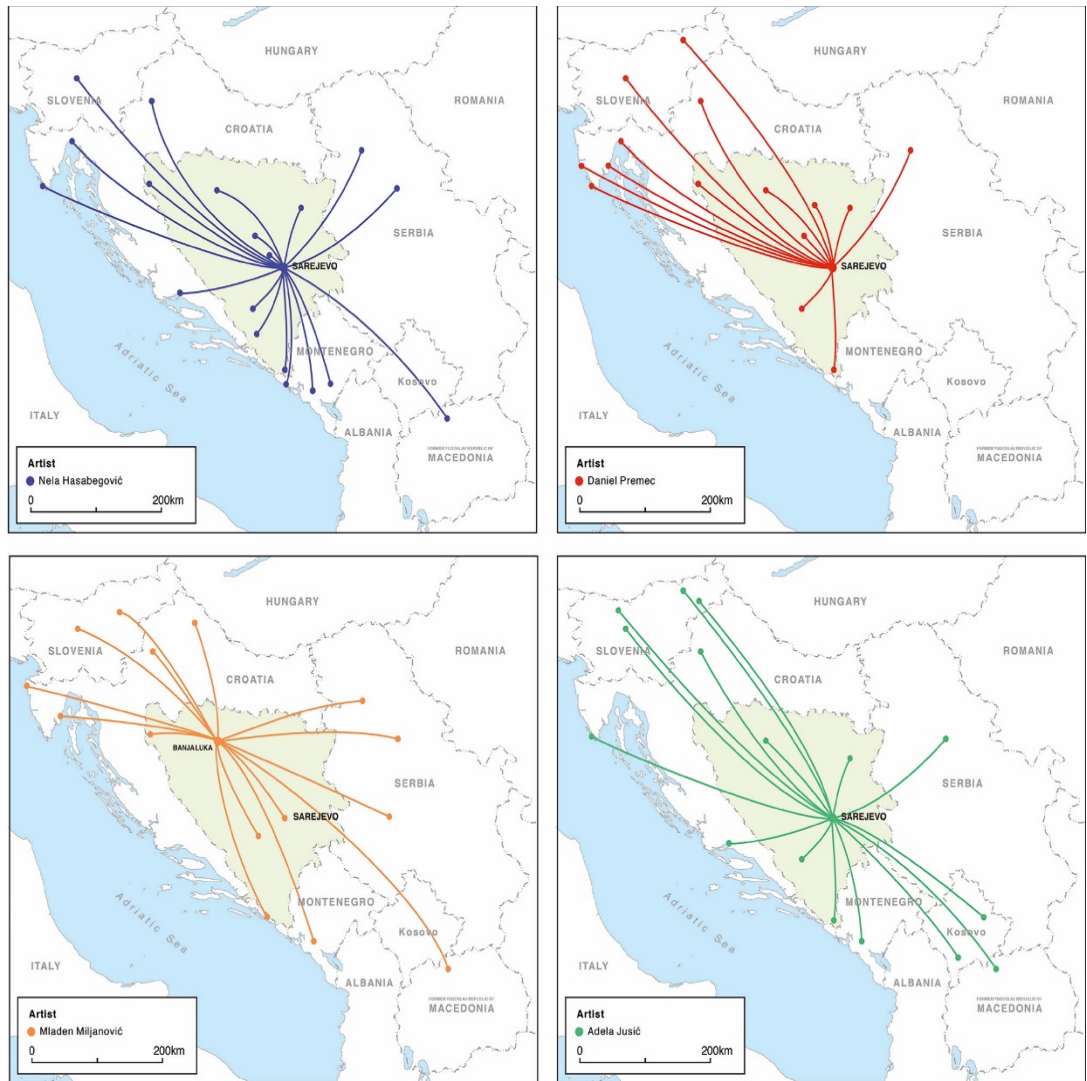


Figure 8.3: Maps showing exhibition patterns of four established Bosnian artists

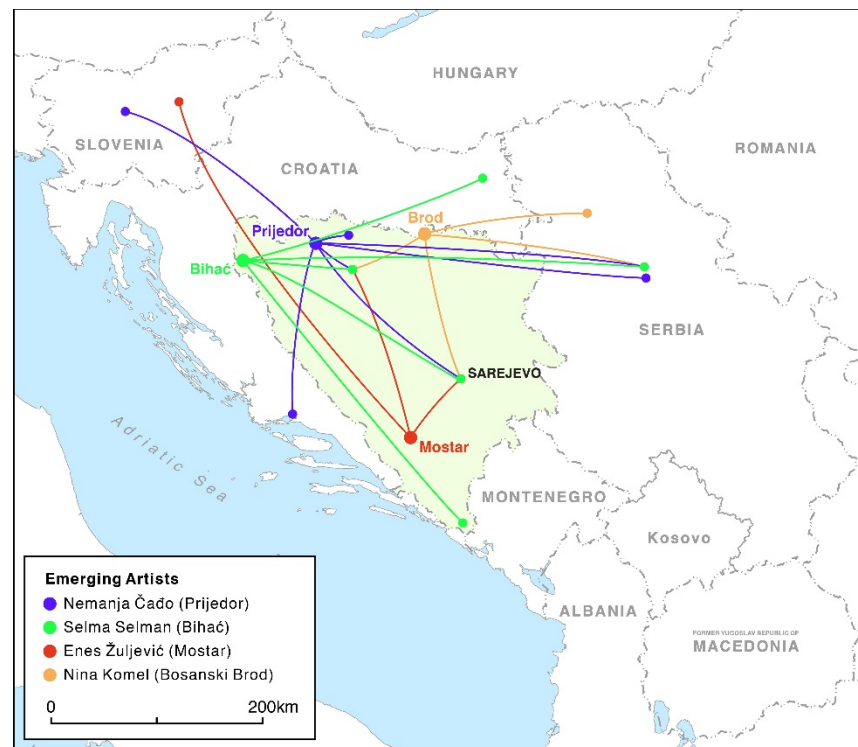


Figure 8.4: Map showing exhibition shows of four upcoming Bosnian artists

Above (see figures 8.3 and 8.4) are maps of the exhibiting patterns of four established (aged 30+) and four upcoming (aged 21-30) Bosnian artists. The UCL drawing office created the maps, which are based on my interview data and analysis of artist portfolios. I wanted to select both established and upcoming artists in order to demonstrate how regional exhibiting patterns evolve over time, but also to demonstrate generational continuity. If I were to only focus on established artists, it could be argued that they have more memory of and therefore allegiance to Yugoslav borders. I also tried to make the gender split equal for both categories, as well as having at least one artist from the Federation and one from Republika Srpska in each.

Through these maps we see that all of the republics of the former Yugoslavia are included to a greater or lesser extent and that within Bosnia, most artists exhibit in both the Federation and Republika Srpska. Whilst the patterns are by no means as extensive for younger artists, the maps demonstrate that at least within Bosnia itself, all of the selected artists have exhibited in both of the main Bosnian centres (Banja Luka and Sarajevo) as well as other places within the Federation, Republika Srpska and beyond. Limited travel must also be analysed in terms of financial restraints. Younger artists have less money to travel and less reputation to acquire funding. It is important to note that exhibitions in Kosovo are underrepresented, most probably due

to the complex visa restrictions between Bosnia and Kosovo. It is bizarre that, considering the recent history, citizens of all of the former Yugoslav states may travel freely across borders except for Bosnian-Kosovar travel, which requires a visa. By this I mean that Bosnia and Kosovo are the two states that did not have any direct conflict between themselves, and yet their citizens are only allowed to travel freely within and between states that they did have conflicts with.

Mapping out the work of artists in Bosnia not only counters perceptions of fragmentation in the country, but in the former Yugoslavia more broadly. Art networks follow the logic of work rather than politics. Artists want to exhibit as much as possible and with the ease, cost and historical connections, it makes sense to work throughout the former Yugoslavia. In the postwar period, there have been no political issues or incidents around inter-state art exhibitions in the former Yugoslavia, at least not in Bosnia. There was, however, an incident around a historical-political exhibition at the Bosnian History Museum in Sarajevo. In 2013 there was a temporary exhibition at the museum documenting testimonies of rape victims during the war, which proved very controversial because it included Serb victims as well as Bosnian Muslim victims. This controversy was entirely rhetorical however, and no violent incidents or closures occurred.<sup>116</sup> In terms of art exhibitions, the only major postwar incident happened in 2008 at the first exhibition of Kosovar art in Belgrade was highly controversial and had to be closed following an attack on the venue by Serb nationalists (Balkan Insight, 2008; Sekularac and Tzortzi, 2008). This event took place immediately preceding Kosovo's final push for internationally recognised independence, so political tensions were high in general. However, there have been similar exhibitions since that have passed without incident and my research does not in any case focus on Kosovar-Serb relations, which embody different physical dynamics. This is something that might be explored further in the field of art and culture, and beyond.

Now that I have discussed the exhibition maps of various artists in Bosnia, I will discuss three projects that demonstrate the strength of Balkart in terms of subverting regional stereotypes and responding to the region's liminal position in the global art market and history: Kosovo 2.0's Balkart edition (2013), the ArtEast 2000+ collection

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<sup>116</sup> Notes from a pre-PhD trip to Sarajevo, July 2013

in Ljubljana, and the Balkan Museum Network. Bosnian artists and cultural workers feature prominently in all of the projects, some of which go further than former Yugoslav boundaries in an attempt to curate a history and voice for East European art. Kosovo 2.0 and the Balkan Museum Network focus almost exclusively on the former Yugoslavia (plus Albania), whereas ArtEast has a broader Eastern European approach, but with a geographical foundation in, and significant amount of material and cooperation from, the former Yugoslav states. Not only do these projects demonstrate a growing interest in formally conceptualising Balkan art as a unified space against the construction of this space as liminal to the west; but they also show that even in the more controversial spaces of the former Yugoslavia, there is an interest to acknowledge the shared history and positionality.

Two of the projects with a geographical base in the former Yugoslavia are coordinated in states with very controversial attitudes towards Yugoslavia: Kosovo and Slovenia. Of course due to the independence of all of the former states of Yugoslavia, the relationship is controversial and complex throughout. However, Slovenia was the first country to call for the dissolution of Yugoslavia and is probably one of the least Yugonostalgic in terms of public and political sentiment, whilst commercially they are ahead in terms of capitalising on the Yugoslav past (Volčič, 2007). As a result of the extreme violence it has experienced, Kosovo has seen a shift in allegiance towards Albania and Albanian heritage more than Yugoslavia. It is therefore interesting to note that even in two of the most Yugoslavia-ambivalent countries, art has aligned along paths entangled with this collective history.

Launched in 2010 as an online media portal for independent journalism in Pristina, Kosovo 2.0 began publishing themed print editions in 2011.<sup>117</sup> Most include articles from across the former Yugoslavia and a Balkart edition was published in 2013. This represented a chance for artists and cultural workers across the former Yugoslavia and Albania to come together and discuss common problems, themes and culture. It also presented listings of alternative art spaces and events throughout the region, those that might not otherwise get much press outside of their home countries. The print versions are only available in English but the website provides Albanian, English and

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<sup>117</sup> Image, Corruption, Religion, Sex, Public Space, Balkart, Migration, Sports, the Green Issue, the 90s

Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian options. The Balkart edition includes pieces on Duplex 100m2 gallery in Sarajevo (Dedović, 2013), Mladen Miljanović's work leading up to his selection as the Bosnian representative at the 2013 Venice Biennale (Zini, 2013), the history of participatory artforms in Yugoslavia (Carl, 2013), cultural funding problems in Bosnia (Blackwood, 2013), institutional problems in Kosovo (Hoxha, 2013), and Kosovar poetry (Zhegrova, 2013).

The focus of the edition is on individual projects and collective struggles. For example, Bytyci's (2013, pp. 12-16) humorous *Guide to being a Balkan artist* includes the following points:

1. Tear up your passport ... you cannot be a true Balkan artist if you are able to roam freely through the world. You have to experience isolation ...
2. Get inside the box ... You notice that there are several topics that constantly recur ... war, nationalism, ethnicity, identity, reconciliation, statebuilding
- ...
7. Suffering and meaning [in relation to economic and political transition] ...
8. A matter of money ...
9. The supply and demand of kitsch [referring to local art market demands] ...
10. The language of your dreams [referring to post-migration identity]

This manifesto is very similar to issues that I have discussed in relation to Bosnia specifically in terms of financial struggles; pressures relating to conforming to certain stereotypes regarding war, ethnicity and nationalism; and isolation from the world both in terms of art production and freedom of movement. It indicates broader patterns across Balkan states, de-linked from ethnicity but a by-product of the ineffectual ethno-elite regimes entrenched during the breakup of Yugoslavia. The framing of this narrative can also be linked back to the strategies of humour identified in chapter seven. It employs the humour of overidentification with the identity of a 'Balkan artist' but identifies real shared problems and solidarities through humour. In such a bleak situation, sometimes all you can do is laugh. But rather than simply being defeatist, framed in a broader Balkart connectivity dialogue, it can motivate people to work together towards collective solutions. These include, but are not limited to, improving regional networks and collaborations, and challenging international stereotypes and limitations.



One way in which cultural workers are uniting around these shared limitations is the Balkan Museum Network. Established in 2006, it connects museum and cultural workers across the former Yugoslavia and Albania through a series of workshops, seminars and collaborative projects. Since 2013 they have introduced the ‘Meet See Do’ conference. Hosted by various cities within the network, these are industry-specific, academic-style conferences that are open to all cultural workers in the former Yugoslavia and Albania, whether they are institutionally affiliated or not. Not only does it work against nepotistic Balkan institutions, allowing independent cultural workers to connect as well, but it also demonstrates the strength of shared experience. Problems across the Balkan Museum Network member states are very similar and unique from those faced in Western cultural scenes. Combined with shared histories and, in some cases, language, it demonstrates once more the ways in which art networks run along practical rather than ethnic or national lines. It also demonstrates the ways that cultural workers can move beyond the limitations placed on them by a lack of or limited interest from international cultural structures to foster regional solutions and collaborations.

To close, I will discuss two projects that tackle the problematic theoretical framework surrounding Balkan and East European art more broadly, entrenched by the centuries of European Othering outlined by Todorova (2009) and the limited external interest and engagement with regional art practices. ArtEast 2000+ is an art collection started in the 1990s by Slovenian curator Zdenka Badovinac ‘as a tool for creating history in the context of the West’s domination in establishing its art history as the only internationally valid canon’ (Kazalarska, 2013, p. 27). It evolved from a private project, to a series of exhibitions at the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, to a permanently changing collection at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana. All artworks in the collection note the communist and post-communist country names, for example: ‘Darinka Pop-Mitić, *Useful Idiot* (2016), Belgrade, Yugoslavia, now Serbia.’<sup>118</sup> This establishes links with broader regional histories but also the shared Yugoslav history. The positive impact of establishing these art histories in a more formal way as distinct from Western art histories is that it can be

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<sup>118</sup> Notes from visit to the *Low Budget Utopias* exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana (22/07/2016)

used not only to counter assumptions of the Balkans, but also to create new possibilities for the international production, reception and display of artworks.

The collection can also be seen as a continuation of or collaboration with the Irwin group's Art East Map project (1999-2005). Irwin formed in 1983 and was the fine arts section of the Slovenian/Yugoslav NSK movement. Noting a lack of documented history of Eastern European art and its limited connection to global art history, '[t]he aim ... [was] to present art from the whole space of Eastern Europe, taking artists out of their national frameworks and presenting them in a unified scheme' (Irwin, 2006, p. 12). Its full title was 'East Art Map: A (re)construction of the history of contemporary art in Eastern Europe' (Irwin, 2006, p. 11) and it was executed in two phases: 1999-2002 saw the creation of the map, and 2002 – 2005 included essays from cultural workers across Eastern Europe to accompany it.

More and more artists and curators are attempting to work around colonial relationships towards Eastern European art (Badovinac et al., 2012; Cârnelci, 2007; Kazalarska, 2013), showing that art can be a powerful tool in the redefining of borders and history. Redefining existing borders and history is an important task but it is difficult to balance the line of neither "Othering" nor homogenising the art histories of Eastern Europe. As Badovinac (1999, p. 10) states in her introduction for the exhibition catalogue *Body and the East*, the big question for projects such as East Art Map and ArtEast 2000+ becomes: 'Is it possible to avoid the "representational" role of the Eastern artist?' This is not an easy line to tread but as my research has demonstrated, the key is to normalise the practices of eastern European artists and to talk about the work in ways that do not exoticise their geographical context, but equally do not compare them to Western art histories. Projects like East Art Map and ArtEast 2000+ have done great work to map out the development of eastern art histories that aim to navigate this line.

My research demonstrates the need to reconceptualise Balkanist discourses and the representational expectations placed on Bosnian artists. The exhibitions, literature and galleries that have built around projects such as East Art Map and ArtEast 2000+ demonstrate the strength and individuality of movements in the region, and their shared histories as distinct from Western patterns. By creating these collective

histories, cultural workers in the former Yugoslavia are able to frame works outside of global narratives of the region. In the *Dystopian Futures* (2016) exhibition, for example, works were framed around topics such as migrations, deindustrialisation, architecture and the body. These are global themes filtered through a Balkan lens, providing a space where artists cease to be Serb, Bosniak, Croat, Slovene and so on, and are just seen as artists with a unique position from which to explore different concepts. This links back to the questions surrounding the normalisation of the spaces in which art is produced and consumed that I have discussed throughout the thesis. This is a common problem for artists working in an ex-Yugoslav or Balkan context due to the recent violent histories that have dominated discussions of both art and the region more broadly.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has challenged the Balkanist discourses surrounding ideas of tolerance and integration in postwar Bosnia. In it, I have argued for a focus not only on non-political actors and networks, but also on the more flowing and ephemeral spaces and encounters with difference. Demographic and political examinations alone do not create a full picture of postwar relations, and whilst alternative models of analysis have been pointed out by scholars such as Jeffrey (2013), political geography has yet to move beyond deconstructing formal actors and processes. Artistic networks and collaborations are some of the most developed in the country, and demonstrate alternative patterns of organisation to create a functioning work system, regardless of ethnic or national borders.

My argument is not that tensions do not exist, but rather that neocolonial perceptions of the Balkan Other have prevented a more nuanced understanding of tolerance and difference in the region. Whilst critical geopolitics has done much to explore the constructed nature of borders and fragmentation (Campbell, 1999; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail, 2005; Toal and Dahlman, 2011), my research engages with spaces that are deviant from these borders in order to show movements, interactions and engagements across ethnic lines. This has impacts not only for the study of post-conflict contexts more broadly, but also the ways that the international community has chosen to fund and engage with projects in the former Yugoslavia. I have demonstrated that, as scholars such as Sivac-Bryant (2016) note, projects promoting positive change in the

region have often succeeded in spite of rather than because of the limited frameworks of international involvement.

The art networks and projects I have outlined here show an alternative geography of identification along the lines of the shared problems of Bosnian artists and the potential collective solutions. I also began to explore networks in the broader ex-Yugoslav/Balkan region. The following chapter will expand this further to the concept of Yugonostalgia, but here I have demonstrated the efforts of artists and cultural workers to strengthen and build their exposure; but also to coherently frame and map regional art histories as distinct from the West. This again builds on Todorova's (2009) concept of Balkan Othering and how artists are working collectively to define themselves as neither Other, nor same, nor liminal to global art histories.

Overall this chapter has moved the literature on postwar Bosnia (Campbell, 1999; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail, 2005; Dahlman and Tuathail, 2005; Toal and Dahlman, 2011) and Balkanism (Bakic-Hayden, 1995; Goldsworthy, 2013; Todorova, 2009) forward by exploring the alternative spaces, temporalities and networks of art practices. This pushes research towards a more active mode of engagement with on-the-ground actors, endorsed by feminist/subaltern geopolitics as an alternative to the mainly top-down approach of political geography. It has also dealt with the representational problems faced by Bosnian artists and the identities forced on them by the international community (academics, INGOs, media, curatorial and so on). By exploring artists and the networks that build around them, my research demonstrates that it is possible for large groups from a variety of backgrounds to work together practically, regardless of ethnic or national borders.

## **Chapter Nine: Exploring alternative models of cultural production in post-Dayton Bosnia**

### **Introduction**

Building on the idea of networks and connections outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on the phenomenon of Yugonostalgia and the role it plays in the contemporary cultural scene in Bosnia. Whilst there has been much academic focus on Yugonostalgia in relation to politics and culture (Bošković, 2013; Kolstø, 2014; Lindstrom, 2005; Volčić, 2007), and nostalgia in post-socialist states more broadly (Boym, 2001), scholars have yet to move beyond theoretical analysis of its forms. By this I mean that they have explored the various forms of nostalgia present in societies across the globe but not the functions or practical applications these forms might have. My research expands on this by examining how forms of nostalgia present in Bosnia are being used on the ground by artists and cultural activists to rethink the production, reception and display of art in contemporary Bosnia. In other words, I am exploring the practical applications of Yugonostalgia in the radical restructuring of the cultural field in Bosnia into a more functioning model; something that has so far only been discussed in theoretical terms.

First I outline the forms of Yugonostalgia present in contemporary Bosnian, but more broadly ex-Yugoslav society. This ranges from using Yugonostalgia as direct opposition to contemporary ethno-nationalist politics, to using it to promote tourism based on global communist tourism trends. I identify the complexities inherent in these processes, demonstrating that nostalgia should not be considered as simply an idealised longing for the past, but rather an active tool for reimagining the present/future. This has geographical implications too, as it demonstrates activities that disrupt geopolitical borders in both Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly.

I then go on to explore some of the practical applications of Yugonostalgia, through an examination of the emergence and development of the cultural NGO Akcija and what I interpret as the 'resurrection of the five-year plan.' My research demonstrates how artists and cultural workers are taking elements from the socialist system to meet contemporary needs, highlighting how studies and engagements with the region might

start to analyse Yugonostalgia and identification with the Yugoslav past in more active ways. Through a comparison of art under socialism in Yugoslavia and Akcija's plans for culture in contemporary Bosnia, my research shows the practical benefits of identifying and working outside of ethno-nationalist borders and politics through alignment with a more Yugonostalgic cultural approach.

The chapter closes with a discussion of a different approach to the position of the artist in society. This builds on academic debates around socially engaged art practices (Bishop, 2012), where I put forward an argument for further study of the socially engaged artist rather than socially engaged art in contemporary Bosnia. By this I mean that artists in Bosnia are extremely socially engaged and that if we only focus on their artworks, we miss this important dimension. Therefore, whilst art and politics can never be fully separated, an examination of the ways in which Bosnian artists are engaged outside of their work is essential in order to avoid critiques that by leaving recent history out their work, they are trying to whitewash it or forget. The question of the socially engaged artist as opposed to socially engaged art is not limited to Bosnia or post-conflict societies generally, however. There is a strong correlation between artists and political activism globally. But the focus of this research is to examine how, in a state where nothing functions, artists are using their collective resources to make things happen practically rather than through dialogue alone, thereby avoiding exploiting sensitive issues in their work. This has implications for the future of both cultural production in Bosnia and global cultural spheres more broadly. It also places art and artists in a key role that is symbiotic with society, repositioning them in similar ways to the role they played in Yugoslavia.

Projects across Bosnia, but particularly the reopening of Zemaljski Muzej<sup>119</sup> in Sarajevo, demonstrate that young artists and cultural workers are developing more sustainable projects and systems than post-Dayton governments and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). The success of these projects has further implications for the study of fragmentation in postwar Bosnia and disrupts the concept of fixed ethnicised borders, since it demonstrates once again that there are actually-existing models that have been based on cooperation across ethnic or national lines.

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<sup>119</sup> The National Museum of Bosnia, known commonly as Zemaljski

### **The new face of (Yugo)nostalgia**

Nostalgia is a complex phenomenon that has been researched in many different contexts. In Central and Eastern European studies, the complexity of this phenomenon has been heightened due to the variety of forms of post-socialist nostalgia. One key text is sociologist Svetlana Boym's (2001) *The Future of Nostalgia*. In it, she outlines two forms – *restorative* and *reflective* (Boym, 2001). *Restorative* nostalgia aims to recreate a past, most commonly to solidify nation building projects or particular ethnicised identities (Boym, 2001). *Reflective* nostalgia on the other hand is based on longing, collective memory and reinterpreting the past (Boym, 2001). My research explores how nostalgia functions in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly, and the increasingly popular term 'Yugonostalgia' (Bošković, 2013; Kolstø, 2014; Lindstrom, 2005; Velikonja, 2010; Volčič, 2007). Mostly studied from a sociology and cultural studies perspective, I expand the literature by exploring Yugonostalgia's connection to geopolitics, and the practical applications these connections might have for further study of the region.

Boym (2001, p. xiv) describes nostalgia as 'the incurable modern condition.' In her study of this modern condition, she explores the various manifestations of nostalgia from pop culture to architecture to politics. Nostalgia has an inherently geographic connotation, especially in the context of countries that no longer exist. The etymology of the word comes from the Greek *nostos* – home/homecoming and *algia* – pain/longing (Boym, 2001). Therefore although it is often associated with temporal longing, there exists a connection to place alongside time, culture and so on. In geography, nostalgia has been studied in the context of diasporas (Wen-Chao Li, 2016), markets (Wells and Watson, 2005), historic communities (Wheeler, 2016) and radical movements (Bonnett, 2009) to name a few. Whether it is the idyllic fictional landscapes imagined by the Chinese diaspora in Taiwan (Wen-Chao Li, 2016), creating a sense of community attachment through local history (Wheeler, 2016), or imagined political landscapes (Bonnett, 2009), all of these studies demonstrate how nostalgia works to construct an idea of place. This is relevant to my research on the role of nostalgia in contemporary Bosnian society because it demonstrates the active element of nostalgia, what Wheeler (2016) terms 'productive nostalgia'. In her article on local history and productive nostalgia, Wheeler (2016) demonstrates how nostalgia can work productively to create local connections, even for newcomers to areas.

Whilst not always positive, she argues against the isolationist discourse of local nostalgia towards a nostalgia that is more open and inclusive. As I will demonstrate, Yugonostalgia is also working against the more isolationist ethnic nostalgias in Bosnia to create a more inclusive landscape for culture and beyond.

To return to Boym's (2001) work, as well as defining various forms and manifestations of nostalgia, she has a particular focus on post-socialist cities (Moscow, St Petersburg, Berlin). This is because many post-socialist cities and states are still transitioning out of socialist models into the global capitalist system and suffering from rapid capitalist restructuring. The 'wild capitalism' (Slavnić et al., 2013) this region has witnessed since the end of socialism has led to mass unemployment and deindustrialisation within an exceptionally short period of time. It is therefore understandable that the security and functional quality of the old systems would contain a certain draw for citizens now suffering under the crumbling new structures, even if those pasts had problems of their own.

In the case of Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly, I would suggest that *reflective* Yugonostalgia must compete with the *restorative* nationalist nostalgia of the ethno-elites in charge of regional politics. My research focuses on *reflective* Yugonostalgia to try to shift the political geography literature on Bosnia towards a more feminist/subaltern approach by actively engaging with those who are using *reflective* Yugonostalgia to challenge the 'symbolic geographies of disunity that have dominated political discourse in (the) former Yugoslavia for the last two decades' (Lindstrom, 2005, p. 227). I have quoted the political scientist Nicole Lindstrom here. My research expands on her work and the work of others (Bošković, 2013; Kolstø, 2014; Luthar and Pušnik, 2010; Velikonja, 2010; Volčić, 2007) in several ways. First, by moving beyond textual analysis to engage with the people and spaces that enact elements of *reflective* Yugonostalgia. Second, I extend the challenge posed by *reflective* Yugonostalgia beyond symbolic geographies to the material geographies of borders and politics in the region. But most importantly, I change the parameters of competing forms of nostalgia in the former Yugoslavia.

In her paper on Yugonostalgia, Lindstrom (2005) outlines the existence of both *restorative* and *reflective* Yugonostalgia in contemporary society. I instead take her



examination of *reflective* Yugonostalgia and place it in opposition to a *restorative* nostalgia that has no basis in the Yugoslav past but rather in the (imagined) homogenous ethno-communities that predated its existence. This is something that is backed-up by a historical examination of the emergence of the term Yugonostalgia. As early as 1996, the Croatian writer and political commentator Dubravka Ugrešić identifies the emergence of the term amongst politicians to negatively label outsiders, those opposed to their ethno-territorial claims:

The word is used as a political and moral disqualification: the Yugonostalgic is a suspicious person ... a Yugonostalgic is the enemy of democracy. The term 'Yugonostalgia' belongs to the new terminology of war (Ugresic, 1996, p. 36)

Today this danger and suspicion is not so prevalent perhaps because the ethno-nationalist political elites believe that they have cast out the Yugonostalgics as a relic from the power struggles of the nineties. However, Yugonostalgia still exists as a challenge to their postwar systems and is not indulged enough to allow it to become a real threat. It is still cast out as different perhaps because there is an underlying threat element felt by those at the top of the power chain in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia.

Much discussion of nostalgia and Yugonostalgia is located in the cultural field (Bošković, 2013; Boym, 2001; Lindstrom, 2005; Luthar and Pušnik, 2010; Volčič, 2007). This is because, as Luthar and Pušnik (2010, p. 12) state:

By focusing on the microanalysis of everyday we wish to stress the agency of individuals in their daily lives and different forms of non-conformity as well as the impossibility of reducing society to a neatly coherent model

Reinserting the agency of everyday citizens in Bosnia into studies of the region is at the core of my research, and art is a key outlet for this agency, as it can be interpreted as public expression of private but often collective experience.

When I talk about ‘the agency of everyday citizens’, it is important to specify whom I am engaging with. By ‘everyday citizens’, I mean those not in political control, who are alluded to but not engaged with in existing political geography studies of postwar Bosnia. Artists in Bosnia are very much part of the ‘everyday’ with much less privilege than is perceived to be the case for their Western counterparts. Whilst not always the case, there is the perception that artists in the West come from more privileged backgrounds or at least the better end of ‘everyday’, and are therefore not representative of the ‘everyman’. This is because training and the precarious job market afterwards require a certain amount of capital but also because the art market is much more developed, so art sells for more than in the Bosnian case. There is very little market for art in Bosnia, so money has to be made elsewhere. Without positions teaching in one of the art institutions, which still in no way compare financially to Western equivalents, even the more successful artists in Bosnia struggle in terms of money. Jobs are scarce, so this means unemployment, temporary work, bar/restaurant work or, if lucky, adapting artistic skills to graphic design work.<sup>120</sup> Art is therefore as disenfranchised as any other position outside of the political elite in Bosnia and, as one informant commented: ‘there’s no money in anything, so why not art?’<sup>121</sup>

Pierre Courtin’s work at Duplex 100m2 gallery in Sarajevo tries to address some of the financial issues associated with being an artist in Bosnia by connecting local artists with the international market. Additionally projects such as the first international art fair in Sarajevo in 2015 attempted to allow Bosnian artists the opportunity to sell their works. However, in this case in particular, it was difficult for artists outside of Sarajevo to attend. Tač.ka, for example, were invited but could not attend because all artists have to pay for the production, and transportation of their works, as well as themselves. In Tač.ka’s case, this would mean developing prints from Ars Kozara, which costs money that they do not have, with no guarantee that they would make profit or even break even.<sup>122</sup> Overall, these projects are small and do not fully address the underlying structural problems in the Bosnian cultural system.

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<sup>120</sup> Observations and interviews with Jon Blackwood: art historian, curator and editor of the Sarajevo Culture Bureau (20/06/2014); Mela Žuljević: artist and Abart coordinator (26/05/2014); Borjana Mrđa: artist and professor at the Banja Luka Art Academy (17/06/2014); Dragan Indžić and Nemanja Čađo (various between February 2014 and September 2015)

<sup>121</sup> Notes from meeting with Mela Žuljević: artist and Abart coordinator (26/05/2014)

<sup>122</sup> Field notes from conversations with Nemanja Čađo: artist and Tač.ka coordinator (20/04/2015)

I have already touched on some similarities in practice between current and Yugoslav art scenes in Chapter Seven. Outside of artistic practices, many people I spoke with would lecture me on communist ideology or the benefits of the Yugoslav system, several still referred to the language as Serbo-Croat, and some viewed the war as preferable to the 25-year postwar transition period because ‘at least there was movement and possibility – something was happening.’<sup>123</sup> These comments are not based on identification with the aims of the war, but rather with the collective sense of feeling stuck during the period following it. This demonstrates a point made by historian Anna Sheftel (2011), that when studying the former Yugoslavia, we see different relationships to truth are present in society. In post-conflict conversations she conducted in 2010 with Sarajevans about their attitude towards Yugoslavia, it was revealed that any nostalgia or faith in the Yugoslav narrative that was present was not based on blind trust or belief that Yugoslavia ‘worked’ as a state. Many of her respondents were well aware of the lies inherent in the Yugoslav state system but for them it was a lie that functioned to promote a peaceful environment. Yugonostalgia cannot be claimed as a universal sentiment or one without contradiction, but my research shows it to be a common factor underlying artistic practice and political outlooks. It is therefore something that should be explored further when thinking about both the cultural environment and the nature of the public in contemporary Bosnia.

There is however a different angle to Yugonostalgia: tourism and capital gain (Volčič, 2007), which Boym (2001) recognises in other post-socialist countries too. Writing about Slovenia, media studies scholar Zala Volčič (2007) notes how images of Tito and Yugoslavia are used in the country today in everything from cafes to advertisements for Mercedes cars. This is true in Bosnia too. There is a Café Tito in Sarajevo, its walls adorned with images of the Marshall, and one of the top attractions in the nearby town of Konjić is Tito’s secret bunker, which is occasionally used for art events too. A bit further down the Neretva River towards Mostar, the famous Second World War bridge wreckage is preserved for tourists with a gift shop nearby, and Prijedor has a Nostalgia bookstore with the Yugoslav state outline and flag above the door. More generally, along the streets of any tourist area you will find Yugoslav-themed gifts. My favourite examples of this are the mugs and t-shirts you can buy in

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<sup>123</sup> Notes from meeting with Selma (anonymised): LGBTQ activist, Sarajevo (25/05/2015)

Sarajevo's Baščaršija area with a picture of Tito and the slogan 'Josip Broz Dobar Skroz.'<sup>124</sup>

Volčić (2007, p. 25) speaks of this commercial form of Yugonostalgia as follows: 'if socialism relied on the promise of a Utopia yet to come, capitalism feeds on a sense of loss.' Reading it this way could imply that it is a shallow form of Yugonostalgia and whilst I do believe it is important to distinguish between different forms, I do not believe that it is helpful to discard certain forms as shallow or less important. These commercial aspects of Yugonostalgia can 'transform "real" history into entertainment and mere spectacle' (Volčić, 2007, p. 21) but do not discredit the validity of the sentiment. Commercial forms also indicate the capacity to make money from Yugonostalgia, demonstrating significant regional and international demand, plus the ability to make money, which is not easy to do in Bosnia.

Connected to ideas of tourism but grounded in a more research/aesthetics-based engagement with the past is the hype that has recently emerged around the Yugoslav war memorials. This interest is both regional and international, though the international is based almost exclusively on aesthetics and the 'sci-fi'(Bierend, 2013)/futuristic feel of them. The Second World War monuments are giant concrete abstractions often with National Parks built around them that were initially an attempt by the Yugoslav government to develop tourism as part of a socialist unification strategy (Frost and Hall, 2012; Sahovic and Zulumovic, 2015). They are key examples of brutalist architecture and the interest in them therefore fits global trends around both ruins (Apel, 2015; Desilvey and Edensor, 2013; Gordillo, 2014; Makarius, 2004) and brutalism (Hatherley, 2015, 2008; Pyzik, 2014). The literature on ruins is complicated to apply directly to the Yugoslav monuments because they are not ruins per se. The durability of concrete means that the total destruction of Yugoslav war memorials is unlikely without human intervention. However, the literature on ruins raises interesting and applicable discussions of fetishisation, and many of the sites are not preserved in the postwar period in the same way that they would have been during the Yugoslav period. In Croatia, where links to a shared past are particularly problematic, several were even actively destroyed during and following the war. Here

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<sup>124</sup> Tito's full title was Marshall Josip Broz Tito. The slogan therefore translates to 'Josip Broz, a really great guy/what a guy'

attempts to identify the newly independent state as something totally separate from the rest of the former Yugoslavia and that history have been particularly intense.

The literature on the fetishisation of ruins questions the different scales of interaction with these sites (Gordillo, 2014) and the often hollow engagements with them (Apel, 2015; Desilvey and Edensor, 2013). In Gaston Gordillo's (2014, p. 258) book *Rubble*, he notes how a privileged class of academic and cultural workers has designated sites as 'ruins' to fetishise them, and abstract them from both their past geographies and 'the living geographies of the present.' In this critique he brings in the point that local communities are often more attuned to the nuances of history and the connection that ruin-sites have to this. Here he is discussing how privileged and distanced observers distort rubble into ruin so it is not wholly applicable to a discussion of Yugoslav monuments, which are mostly intact. However, it is useful when examining nostalgia and the emergence of interest around the monuments. For international observers especially, the monuments become empty aesthetic objects divorced from their individual contexts. What was a memorial to the victims of Jasenovac concentration camp becomes an object 'from another planet' (Bierend, 2013). It does come from another planet of sorts: the historic landscapes of Yugoslavia. However, the planet international observers refer to is of a more science fiction sort. The more images of the monuments are circulated online through blogs and social media sites, the more they become simply one in a series of global brutalist documents. Citizens of the former Yugoslavia, especially those who experienced Yugoslavia, have a more nuanced knowledge of these objects, which makes the monuments more tangible symbols of the past, present and future. Conversely, much like Gordillo (2014, p. 5) writes of 'local people's estrangement from the concept of ruins', this more intimate and familiar connection means that people in the former Yugoslavia are perhaps 'estranged' from the global popular interest in the monuments as objects of aesthetic beauty; hence why many have been left unmaintained since the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Two projects that attempt to disrupt the process of abandonment, and to document and engage with the history of the Yugoslav monuments are the internationally-led

*Spomeniky*<sup>125</sup> and the ex-Yugoslav *Inappropriate Monuments*. *Spomeniky* is a broader project to photograph and document the history of semi-abandoned constructions across Central and Eastern Europe, starting with the Yugoslav monuments. The members hope to preserve the history of socialist memorials that have been largely left to disappear over time. *Inappropriate Monuments* is a collaboration between artists and researchers from Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia. They are working collectively to preserve and reevaluate the cultural heritage of the Yugoslav monuments. The group's activities include education, exhibitions and symposia throughout the former Yugoslavia. The first travelling exhibition, *On Revolution's Road*, began in 2016, visiting Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Kraljevo, Niš, Šabac, Pula, Split, Karlovac and Skopje. Mapping out photographs of the various monuments, along with contemporary artistic engagements with them, the aim was to trace the development of society and the role of monument tourism in building the Yugoslav state/citizen, and to contrast this with the position of the monuments today, which at best are ignored and left to ruin but at worst, have been destroyed.<sup>126</sup>

A motivation behind these projects, especially *Inappropriate Monuments*, can be seen in what scholars of ruins and brutalism have identified as the objects' symbolic quality of what has been lost (Apel, 2015; Desilvey and Edensor, 2013; Hatherley, 2008) and what could be (Desilvey and Edensor, 2013; Hatherley, 2008). Speaking of British modernism and its role in attempting to shape a more progressive social democratic system, Owen Hatherley (2008, p. 3) writes that 'we have been cheated out of the future, yet the future's ruins lie about us, hidden or ostentatiously rotting.' For citizens of the former Yugoslav states involved in projects that engage with monuments, they are interacting not only with the history that the monuments memorialise but also the history of the objects themselves: the legacy of a united Yugoslavia that was building for a future utopia that never arrived. In much the same way that art historian Dora Apel (2015) identifies Detroit's ruins as symbolic of the failure of another system's (capitalist) utopia, the Yugoslav monuments symbolise the failure of a socialist utopia. Apel (2015) discusses this in quite a negative way, stating that contemporary obsessions with the ruins of utopia can lead to political apathy and inertia. Owen

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<sup>125</sup> Comes from the word 'spomenik', which translates roughly to 'monument'

<sup>126</sup> Field notes from visit to the *On Revolution's Road* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana (21/07/2016)

Hatherley (2008, p. 40) concurs in his assertion that '[a] constant danger is that the aesthetic argument can be used as a smokescreen for the political.' However, this does not have to be the case.

In the following sections of this chapter, I demonstrate how Yugonostalgia is being used actively to rework the present and future, but to continue my discussion of the place of the abandoned Yugoslav monuments in this, I will refer again to Gaston Gordillo's (2014) work on rubble. Both Gordillo (2014) and Desilvey and Edensor (2013) note the revolutionary power in ruins. Both note the ways that rubble or ruins are markers of fallen empires and revolution. The elite therefore fears them because 'rubble ... could be an invitation to make the world differently' (Gordillo, 2014, p. 258). This is one reason Gordillo (2014) cites for a lack of interest in engaging with the material histories of rubble: it must instead be incorporated into the more abstract framework of heritage and ruins. Once again, the Yugoslav monuments are not rubble but they do symbolise an alternative to the current ethno-nationalist political systems. They are symbols of how the Republics were once united, which is something that those in charge want to undo. Projects like *Inappropriate Monuments* are attuned to this fact and by mapping what Desilvey and Edensor (2013, p. 479) refer to as the 'oscillating identities' of the sites of Yugoslav monuments, they ensure that the discussion of the alternatives they represent is not erased.

This section has outlined the competing forms of Yugonostalgia and how it is part of the broader struggle between different interpretations of geography, politics and identities in the former Yugoslavia. It is important to recognise the significance of Yugonostalgia as a comment on the present, rather than a rose-tinted view of the past. It is 'self-consciously ambivalent and critical, recognizing the always elusive, inconclusive, and fragmentary nature of memories and fantasies of the Yugoslav past' (Lindstrom, 2005, p. 234). People are aware that Yugoslavia and Tito were not perfect, but can recognise how conditions and prospects for the future were better then (Nada et al., 2011; Sheftel, 2011) and that it offers some useful models for the present. Yugonostalgia and the emerging interest more globally in certain elements of this past indicate some key principles guiding young cultural workers in Bosnia, but also the creative potential of engagements with a different and more unified past. This demonstrates the active rather than passive quality of nostalgia in the region and

points towards possibilities for the future. The following section will go on to engage with the ways that cultural workers are employing elements of Yugonostalgia practically to reimagine a new system for cultural management in postwar Bosnia.

### **Resurrecting the Five-Year Plan**

Now that I have outlined Yugonostalgia and its temporal and spatial relations to culture and society, I will discuss the current situation of culture in Bosnia and how groups such as the Akcija NGO are using Yugonostalgia as a practical tool to combat shared problems in the region. Moving the literature beyond Yugonostalgia as an emotional/theoretical concept to explore how it plays out in a practical way, this section addresses the changing nature of the policies and spaces of culture in Yugoslav and postwar Bosnia. Drawing on cultural policy under the Yugoslav system and the plans of Akcija's *Kultura 2020* project, among others, I show how their Five-Year Plan merges Yugonostalgia with practical planning. The argument is not that Yugoslavia offered a perfect system, nor that cultural workers believe this to be the case. It is simply an analysis of the acknowledgement and reappropriation of the past, and the implications this might have for the future of Bosnia.

Under socialism, art was part of the national development programme in Yugoslavia. This carried its own agenda but it was not as restrictive in terms of censorship and forms of expression as in the USSR (Jakovina, 2012). More importantly, the inclusion of art in national funding and development meant a vast, decentralised public programme for the arts. As Kolečnik (2012, p. 109) notes, an 'impressive amount of solidarity and politically engaged artworks [were] produced within the National Liberation Movement between 1941 and 1945.' Therefore society and art formed together in Yugoslavia, or it was at least viewed as a complementary and concurrent evolution. In contemporary Bosnia, centralisation is cited as one of the biggest problems: 'Currently the biggest events in small towns are weddings and funerals, which wasn't the case in Yugoslavia.'<sup>127</sup> Based on the scale and geographical scope of projects in the Yugoslav period, these models of culture and education are still generally viewed in a positive light. One informant described to me her father's experience as a manager of a company in Yugoslav Bosnia.<sup>128</sup> As the director, he

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Samra Tozo: Art Angle coordinator, Sarajevo (14/05/2015)

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)



would get state-allocated tickets for cultural events in the city for all of his workers. He gave out these tickets at the doors to the events, and made a note of who did and did not attend. This was not to force them to attend but to try to encourage them to take culture seriously. The same informant also found family photographs of ballet performances at car factories.<sup>129</sup> This demonstrates the efforts of the state to integrate art and society at all levels by taking art outside of its dedicated institutions. Of course, this had its own agenda in the sense that art was used to support the development of society and for the promotion of Yugoslavia as a unified and prosperous state. However, the system was not as oppressive or censored in Yugoslavia as it was in other communist countries, especially following the Tito-Stalin split of 1948. Art flourished in this environment, with access to audiences, funding and exhibition spaces.

I was interested to learn more about the position of art and its connection to the public in Yugoslav times, so I went exploring for materials. Using the store collections of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies library, I located a 1950 pamphlet on the 'Culture and Art Activities of the Trade Unions of Yugoslavia' (Milojković, 1950). It is a very illuminating source, detailing both the expansion of art societies and trade union activities connected to culture. Milojković (1950) notes that the Partisans founded art societies during the war because they had a role in morale for civilians and fighters. This morale-boosting quality is similar to the role of art and culture for Yugoslav, but especially Sarajevan, citizens during the nineties. Art and cultural activities continued during the wars and sieges, and were viewed as integral to survival (Zildžo, 2006). However, unlike Yugoslavia, which integrated art and its wartime legacy into its model for society, the successor states of Yugoslavia did not develop a focus or support for art and cultural activities. This could be attributed to the fact that during the Second World War, art and culture were part of the resistance, which won; whereas in the nineties, art and culture were part of a non-violent resistance that lost out to violent ethno-nationalists.

Culture was a strong focus for the trade unions of Yugoslavia and making sure that it was spread beyond the centre was of paramount importance. As Milojković (1950, p. 24) states:

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)

in 1948 in Serbia alone, 107 art societies paid visits to 327 work collectives (mines, building and forest sites, agricultural estates and cooperative home building sites), giving 1360 concerts before an audience of about 500 000.

So it is evident that from the early days, efforts were made to avoid the problems that art and culture are facing today in terms of accessing and encouraging the development of audiences across the region. The activities of the trade unions extended to international visits and were subsidised rather than funded by the state (Milojković, 1950).

The fact that art is absent from political agendas today is just as significant as its presence in the past. As I have discussed throughout the thesis, the political agenda in contemporary Bosnia is fragmentation. As my research also demonstrates, artists work across borders and most are not so interested in ethno-nationalist divisions or if they are, it is usually in terms of subverting those divisions. I therefore argue that the shifting attitudes towards how and where to place culture on national agendas are based on the fact that Yugoslavia was about bringing people together, whereas contemporary politics are based on keeping them apart. If the artistic community generally goes against the aims of the state entities, it is not in the interest of national politics to support such activities or educate young people in fields that promote such collaboration. The Kosovar commentator Luci (2013, p. 4) states that ‘mainstream media and politics treats art as a private activity, as if it is outside of our political sphere and social environment.’ Perhaps this is not because of genuine ignorance of its entanglement with politics but rather knowledge of what its politics represents more broadly. If we consider Kemp-Welch’s (2013) study of antipolitics in twentieth century Central-East European art and her theory that art movements were key in anticipating shifts in political attitudes, we might consider that mainstream media and politics in contemporary Bosnia is wary of affording art too much space. In the Bosnian context, perhaps art is not a predictor of things to come but it does represent a deviation from the systems in place under the current ethno-nationalist elite politicians.

Another element to consider when contrasting cultural policy in Yugoslavia and contemporary Bosnia are the spaces of art. If we consider the activities of Yugoslav trade unions, such as taking art to factories, farms and timber yards, and ballet performances in auto shops, we could conclude that there are some similarities between art under the Yugoslav and contemporary Bosnian systems in terms of it happening outside of institutions. However, there is an enormous difference in both the logic and results of this. Communist spaces of art outside of institutions were not a necessity and their primary aim was to increase access to art for all. Capitalist or transitional spaces of art are a direct result of the shift from a socialist system to the 'wild capitalism' (Slavnić et al., 2013) of today. Whilst artists undoubtedly want to increase their audiences, taking art to the streets or a national park is a direct result of the limited funds and spaces to exhibit, and the varied audiences as experienced under Yugoslavia are not guaranteed. So today art operates under an improvised system in an attempt to keep it alive, whereas the spaces of the past were part of a wider system aimed at expanding its reach.

Part of the necessity to improvise spaces and events is based on the fact that cultural institutions in Bosnia have faced cuts and closures since the dissolution of Yugoslavia. A second factor is the complex legal status surrounding buildings and artworks/artefacts. Cultural funding and institutions across the former Yugoslavia are facing problems but in Bosnia these problems are further compounded by the fact that there is no central authority for dealing with cultural policy. There are fourteen ministers for culture across the ten cantons of Bosnia, most of them with little to no experience in the arts.<sup>130</sup> In principle this might sound ideal, offering greater autonomy for local governments to fit policies to the needs of individual communities. In practice, it becomes an excuse for a lack of accountability and for confusion over who cultural workers can consult, which in turn leads to inaction and crisis in the cultural sector.

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<sup>130</sup> Based on field notes and interviews with Andrej Bereta: art historian, curator and Ars Kozara collaborator (various February 2014-September 2015); Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2015 and 28/08/2015)

This situation has ramifications for public engagement with art. As Samra Tozo of the NGO Art Angle<sup>131</sup> informed me, ‘it’s difficult to engage young people when everything is shutting down’<sup>132</sup> due to the lack of government interest and confusion over who should be in charge of institutions and funding. The perceived connection between government indifference and declining audiences is shared by the head curator of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Maja Abdamerović:

It was not important to attract the public to the gallery at first [during Yugoslavia] because it was a normal part of the system and everyday life. The gallery was part of the school system and the whole society was different from now... The problem is that we, I see it, and, it hurts to see and to say, that we don’t have a young public. We just have the middle aged and older people from the time when, the generation that was used to coming to the galleries, to the openings and so on.<sup>133</sup>

The problem of early exposure and dwindling audiences only becomes worse with time. So what are cultural workers doing to address this?

The cultural NGO Akcija, established in 1998, began working on several major projects following the widespread protests in Bosnia in 2014. As co-coordinator of the projects, Ines Tanović-Sijerčić, informed me, it was inspired by the action of the protests and plenums, but pushed further by the following inertia.<sup>134</sup> The 2014 protests were followed by the establishment of citizens’ plenums in almost every city. This was an opportunity for ordinary citizens to gather together to discuss their demands to government for the future organisation of various structural aspects of the Bosnian state. Sarajevo was the only city in Bosnia to have a plenum working group for culture and there was apparently a fair amount of opposition to this amongst non-cultural plenum members: ‘the cake is so small and everyone’s trying to get a bite of it. And

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<sup>131</sup> Art Angle is a Balkan-wide NGO that deals mostly with managing funding for art projects in the region from the European Cultural Foundation’s Balkan Arts and Culture Fund, but also organises some projects of their own

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Samra Tozo: Art Angle coordinator, Sarajevo (14/05/2015)

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Maja Abdamerović: head curator of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (14/08/2014)

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)

somehow culture gets viewed as unimportant.’<sup>135</sup> So culture in recent decades has occupied a dual-space of “unimportance” to political actors on both sides – government and activists. This is ironic considering that artists have consistently been at the forefront of political activism in Bosnia. It therefore indicates a fair-weather-friend attitude amongst political actors, in the sense that whether it be government or anti-government activists, art is only seen as important when they need it to be. Despite this negativity however, the group pushed forward with their work and discussions, which resulted in two of the most practically successful projects in post-Dayton Bosnia: the reopening of Zemaljski Muzej<sup>136</sup> and the establishment of a Creative Europe Desk in Bosnia. I will now discuss the meetings surrounding the establishment of the Creative Europe Desk in Bosnia, and Akcija’s attempts to create a coherent, national five-year plan for culture.

Akcija started working on the Kultura 2020 project in October 2014 and have put into action the first comprehensive plan to rehabilitate and reunify culture in postwar Bosnia. They built up relationships and networks between cultural workers in the various cantons of Bosnia, travelling across the country to discuss important and/or common issues in the cultural sector. With the inclusion of one hundred and fifty partner organisations, institutions and individuals, they came up with sixteen united demands/aims in their manifesto. Figure 9.1 is a translated excerpt from this manifesto:

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)

<sup>136</sup> The literal translation would be ‘Earth Museum’ but the English name of the institution is ‘The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina’

*Akcija Report (2015)*

1. To reform public institutions in the cultural field
  - 1.1. A depoliticisation of the proces of selecting representatives for public cultural institutions...
2. Reforms in the system of cultural financing
  - Examining new ways of financing culture
3. Necessity for cultural strategy at all administrative levels where there is active development of cultural strategy and monitoring of its implementation
4. To establish transparency and accountability
5. Necessity to release information on the entire cultural system, with expert analysis of legislation in the field of culture
6. Necessity to connect and share collectively the cultural sector in Bosnia
7. To develop new audiences: The necessity to connect educational and cultural policy
8. To raise the capacity of the cultural sector to access international funds
9. To expand the jurisdiction of the cultural sector and/or establish a state level ministry for culture
10. The democratisation of culture
  - better distribution of cultural production throughout Bosnia
  - to create a fund for collaboration and mobility throughout Bosnia
11. To open up discussions about public interest in culture, the importance of culture in contemporary Bosnia and the development potential of culture
12. To strengthen the role of public broadcasters in the Bosnia cultural system
13. To encourage regular cultural production and materials to supprtt young talent
14. Logistic and expert support in the independent cultural sector
15. Revision of the privatisation of public property in the cultural field
16. Urgent and structural settlement of the position of the «7 cultural institutions»

*Figure 9.1: Translated extract from the Akcija NGO's 2015 Manifesto document Key Requirements of the Cultural Sector in Bosnia*

The aims outlined in the above document respond directly to contemporary needs, with the knowledge and inspiration that the system functioned much in this way during the Yugoslav period. The shared plan devised by experts across Bosnia demonstrates that it might be possible, with the right organisation, to address problems in the current system outside of the current political structures. Of course money is required but as the work of Akcija shows, this is not the primary problem. The aim across most of their projects is to shine a light on government inefficiency: to ‘create a new model. Show them it can work without them.’<sup>137</sup> And as my research in the former Yugoslavia over the last four years, including Masters research and educational funding, has highlighted, the money is there but ‘it just goes missing.’<sup>138</sup> The view of political elites as corrupt and obstructing the system in Bosnia is backed by analysts and investors (Ajder, 2009; Divjak and Pugh, 2008; Dlouhy, 1999). This is slowing down the path to fully independent statehood, as well as foreign investment and the general functioning of the state. What Akcija are trying to do is to highlight the ineptitude of the government and restore functioning systems for culture. In doing so, they present alternatives for a number of different fields and the success of their work could be applied more broadly, and across all of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia.

With the manifesto document in place, Akcija created a coordination board of twenty-five individuals from different disciplines and cantons, and plan to write cultural strategies at state and canton level to achieve the above demands. When or whether they achieve these aims is secondary to the fact that they are the first organisation to really work on a coherent strategy that includes representatives from cultural fields across Bosnia. Some of the meetings were even historic, such as in Mostar February 2015, which was the first time that Muslim and Croat cultural workers had met since the war and postwar establishment of their separate institutions.<sup>139</sup> Participation in these meetings was by open invitation with no prerequisites or quotas. It therefore does not represent a project with truth and reconciliation as its primary aim, but rather one with practical goals for the future of culture in Bosnia. So far this seems to have a

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<sup>137</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Marta (anonymised): language teacher. Conducted during MSc research on language learning in the UK Serb diaspora (30/05/2012)

<sup>139</sup> Field notes from conversation with Andrej Bereta: art historian, curator and Tač.ka collaborator (18/04/2015). He was also a participant in the Kultura 2020 project

more genuine engagement and long-term potential for sustainability that is based on mutual need and a lack of significant hatred amongst cultural workers of different ethnic backgrounds. This is a further indication that ethnic divides are less clear-cut than top-level politics would suggest. Mostar is an extreme case however, it is just as likely that previous meetings never occurred due to a lack of perceived need, as it is to assume that it was fuelled by violent hatred. Politicians established separate systems for everything in the city. Therefore the lack of cooperation between cultural workers on either side of the divide could be due more to laziness and disorganisation, and competition over limited funds than a manifestation of ethnic bias.

Akcija's work in bringing all of these voices together on the Kultura 2020 project not only represents a more positive outlook for culture in Bosnia, but also a counter to narratives of fragmentation. Cooperative narratives were thrown out by the international community during the war, which led to the exclusion of moderates from the debate and the entrenchment of ethno-elites. Looking to sectors other than the political allows us to see how work functions outside of ethnicised political borders. It demonstrates a more nuanced version of fragmentation where the state is divided politically but practically, people work together regardless of ethnicity to try to create functioning systems, be it cultural, industrial, agricultural and so on.

One of Akcija's biggest material successes so far in relation to the manifesto document was related to point eight: improving access to international funds. During their meetings throughout Bosnia, they also met with ministers to discuss the possibility of establishing a Creative Europe Desk in Bosnia. Initially, as always, the problem was that 'it's politics that blocks things, not people.'<sup>140</sup> There was a dispute with the minister in Banja Luka because he insisted that there must be desk in Banja Luka (Republika Srpska) as well as Sarajevo (the Federation). For Akcija, where and how many desks there were was an unimportant issue but they were concerned about the potential feud-based inertia resulting from having to work the project through government ministries. They then realised that it was not necessary for the representative to be a governmental department, so in July 2015, a desk was established in Sarajevo, headed up by Aida Kalendar from Akcija, and in Banja Luka, headed up by Zoran Galić of VizArt. These are both cultural NGOs affiliated with the

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<sup>140</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)



broader Kultura 2020 project, which should help the desk(s) to function in a coherent and complimentary manner. The benefits of being part of this are that, even as a non-EU country, Bosnia can apply for funds from the €1.4 billion Creative Europe budget and increase collaborations and networking activities with other member country organisations. This will help to address a problem identified by the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

There is interest to include Sarajevo and Bosnia [in European projects]... but no budget or access to funds.<sup>141</sup>

The Creative Europe Desk is still in its infancy in Bosnia, so it remains to be seen what positive changes it will bring, but it is certainly a big step forward for the cultural sector and has facilitated Akcija's next big project, which is to discuss the potential to apply for European Capital of Culture in 2021 or subsequent years. The European Capital of Culture has now opened the project up to non-EU European cities (if their country is a candidate country for EU membership) every third year from 2021. It seems unlikely that Sarajevo will make it for 2021, since the deadline has officially passed now. It also seems unlikely because one of the judging criteria is now based on the 'development potential' of a city (Creative Europe, 2016), which based on the rejection of Belgrade as 2021 European Capital of Culture suggests a preference for non-capital cities, regardless of how 'developed' these cities are. However, the steps are in place and the application could easily be shifted to a smaller city such as Mostar, Trebinje, Zenica or Tuzla. Of course the European Capital of Culture has its problems and controversies that are beyond the remit of this research to explore, but it has regenerated many cities across Europe, increased tourism and business, and offers a great chance for countries like Bosnia to further connect with European artists and art markets.

The work of Akcija on these cultural strategies demonstrates the nuances involved in the use of Yugonostalgia as a practical tool for reimagining the state and cultural field. Rather than a straightforward copy-paste approach from past to present, we see a merging of positives from the old system into a forward-looking contemporary plan.

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with Maja Abdamerović: head curator of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina (14/08/2014)

In their manifesto document, we see calls for the incorporation of cultural policy into other areas of national strategies, such as education; the decentralisation of art and cultural events; the re-nationalisation of cultural property; and the establishment of a central authority to organise this. These aims can be linked to a “normal” functioning system of culture in any country. However, they can also be seen as reinstating the functioning elements of the previous system in the outline of a future one. The Five-Year Plan is also a direct remnant of socialist planning, albeit more connected with the USSR than Yugoslavia. Therefore when activists speak of the Yugoslav system, it should not be viewed as a nostalgic longing for the past, but rather as a practical frame of reference for future plans. By recognising continuities between the Yugoslav past and the Bosnian present, I am not seeking to demonstrate that Yugoslavia still exists in some sense. Instead my research indicates that, outside of political ethno-elite circles, people are using elements of the past to work through contemporary issues in a practical way.

### **Society and the artist**

Now that I have discussed how Yugonostalgia has been applied practically in Bosnia, or the reflections of Yugonostalgia in contemporary cultural activism, I want to explore the idea of the socially engaged artist. There has been much debate around socially engaged art (Bishop, 2006, 2012; Mouffe, 2008) and my research has demonstrated that in the context of Bosnia, pressures to adhere to political or socially engaged tropes are potentially reductive of both art production and the public. However, there is no doubt that artists and cultural workers are at the forefront of effecting change in their communities, both locally and nationally. I therefore want to show how artists in Bosnia are very much at the heart of political activism in society, without having to do this through their work. This political activism is an attempt to create a functioning state, which in turn would normalise the conditions under which art production takes place, and remove some of the pressures to create socially engaged art or art that speaks to certain themes. The aim is to show that their approach to art is connected to but not dependent on their involvement in society, and that it is a further method of normalising the spaces of cultural production. First, I will discuss Akcija’s reopening of Zemaljski Muzej in Sarajevo, followed by a discussion of work with and for local children by the Crvena (Sarajevo) and Tač.ka (Prijeđor) collectives.

From 2008-2012, staff at Zemaljski Muzej, or the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were working unpaid due to its critical financial situation. Following this, when it was no longer sustainable to keep it open, it closed for another three years. This was due in part to the funding issues that have plagued many of the capital's institutions, but also a contentious legal situation that blocked – or rather saved – anybody from claiming responsibility for it. The severity of the situation is highlighted by the fact that the museum survived both World Wars and the war of the nineties without ever having to submit to full closure. It was the postwar political and economic catastrophe that buried it. Although not exclusively an art museum, I include it in my analysis because of Akcija's role in its reopening and the number of artists and cultural workers, who are all part of the same system, that were involved.

As Ines Tanović-Sijerčić of Akcija explained to me, the National Museum's fate is an allegory for giving up on the state<sup>142</sup> because it represents the multicultural history of Bosnia and Yugoslavia more broadly. It is the largest museum collection in the Balkans, not only Bosnia, with over 40 million artifacts, and is internationally famous for housing one of the oldest copies of the Haggadah, a sacred Jewish text. It therefore represents the history of all of the peoples that have inhabited the Balkan region, which is where some believe the problem lies. As Ines stated, 'it's nobody's museum, so nobody wants to take responsibility.'<sup>143</sup> This is something that is echoed by the writer and cultural commentator Dubravka Ugrešić (1996). She speaks more broadly about the cultural legacy of Yugoslavia and how quickly it disappeared during the wars of the nineties, without any thought to preserve it. This is now problematic because, as she observes:

where could you find anyone, in the new national states preoccupied with building their own national ego, prepared to take over discarded 'foreign' rubbish, fifty-years of 'Yugoslav' cultural memory? (Ugresic, 1996, p. 38)

Before Akcija stepped in, forty people were still taking care of the museum without pay. This mostly involved cleaning and making sure that the artifacts were safe. In the winter there was no heating and the storage space was becoming limited due to

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<sup>142</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)

structural problems, such as holes in the roof in places. Akcija's plan, in cooperation with the museum staff, was to 'occupy' the museum to raise support and exert pressure on the government to reach some kind of legal agreement and/or financial commitment to reopen the museum.

Drawing its name and inspiration from Occupy movements around the world, 'Occupy Zemaljski' took on a more complex task than the reclamation of space alone. The activists, in cooperation with the museum staff and a number of volunteers, set up an office in the museum and made an extensive plan to regularly open parts of it to the public, running tours for school children and supporters. As Ines explained:

The plan is to occupy and run it in summer until September and what to do if the government doesn't listen? We stay. Create a new model. Show them it can work without them<sup>144</sup>

Running from July to September 2015 as 'Dežurne Zemaljski/Ja Sam Muzej',<sup>145</sup> the project was immensely successful, with the museum reopening as hoped in September 2015, albeit with a limited time commitment. The team behind the project, Akcija and the museum workers, also won the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage in May 2016. Dežurne, which translates roughly to 'on call/duty', was a symbolic gesture for the public to show support and the museum to show resistance. People would come at an allocated time, sign the guestbook, be encouraged to take and share photos for the website and social media sites, and have a tour run by volunteers of various parts of the museum.

What makes the project even more unique is that money and politics were removed from the campaign. Politicians were banned from entering in an official capacity in order to avoid them using it as a photo opportunity: 'people can only enter as citizens.'<sup>146</sup> They also did not accept financial donations, but instead created a list of items that they needed. As of August 2015, they had received eighty percent of the items they requested, including a 30 000KM (£13 000) air conditioning unit for the Haggadah.

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<sup>144</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)

<sup>145</sup> On duty for Zemaljski/I am the museum

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Ines Tanović-Sijerčić: Akcija coordinator (23/05/2016)

The significance of this project and its success is that it builds on Akcija's theoretical work and plans by physically demonstrating the problems outlined in their manifesto, and that an alternative system can work. Excluding politics and money also supports the argument that things function better without politics, and that money is not the biggest obstacle. The public support and donations show that, as Samra Tozo of Art Angle stated, 'human resources are the greatest resource in the region, so ... [the key is] to harness this power for change.'<sup>147</sup> Although the legal status of the museum has not been resolved, it will be funded for at least three years and has gathered movement towards a resolution in the, hopefully, near future. Compared to the fate of other museums in the former Yugoslavia, such as the Museum of Contemporary Art and National Museum in Belgrade, which have remained closed for eleven and three years respectively, it offers a hopeful model for museums and galleries in the still-in-transition successor states of Yugoslavia.

I will now explore work with and for children by the art collectives Tač.ka (Prijeđor) and Crvena (Sarajevo). In the case of Tač.ka, they were trying to address the issue of exposure to art and creating new audiences. In collaboration with a friend who teaches at a local school, Tač.ka members went to talk to children of various ages about the *Ars Kozara* project, as well as arranging tours of the sites and a local exhibition in the Prijeđor museum: 'for many of them it was the first time they'd heard of that [*Ars Kozara*] project,'<sup>148</sup> even though it is so close to where they live.

This outreach is multifaceted because on the one hand, it is promotion for Tač.ka and *Ars Kozara*, but on the other, it exposes young audiences to art practices more broadly, something that is somewhat lacking at the state or entity level. Coordinating such engagement is important to Tač.ka 'because somehow they (children/teenagers) are one of our basic groups who need to be informed and infected.'<sup>149</sup> Their work with education and cultural outreach ties back into point seven of Akcija's collaborative manifesto: to combine educational and cultural policy to create new audiences. Developed prior to connection with and existence of Akcija's initiative, Tač.ka's

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<sup>147</sup> Interview with Samra Tozo: Art Angle coordinator, Sarajevo (14/05/2015)

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Nemanja Čađo: Tačka member and coordinator (21/02/2014)

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Nemanja Čađo: Tačka member and coordinator (21/02/2014)

outreach work demonstrates the shared principles and goals of artists and cultural workers in Bosnia. Coordinator Nemanja Čado is engaged with other projects involving young people that are not connected to art, such as the annual youth camp on Kozara organised by Prijedor NGO, Centar za Mlade KVART. Centar za Mlade KVART is one NGO tackling many issues in Prijedor - stray animals, LGBT issues, youth outreach and education, political corruption – and they have very close ties with Tač.ka. The two groups support each other's work and help out where possible because they are aligned in their political values and generally ostracised by mainstream politics. One key annual project is the observance of the white armband memorial in the town square. May 31<sup>st</sup> is an international memorial to mark the deportation of Muslims in Prijedor to the detention camps at Omarska, Trnopolje and Keraterm. Centar za Mlade KVART, Tač.ka and other activists have worked tirelessly to allow this to happen, which has met with significant resistance from the Mayor and the Municipal authorities.

Crvena Association for Art, based in Sarajevo, was founded in 2010. It is not only about art, having strong ties to social activism and feminism. The initial idea behind its establishment was to give a voice and strong presence to female artists and feminism, and 'initially it was only women in the organisation but now there are men too because it's important to include all like-minded people.'<sup>150</sup> Members include artists, architects, engineers, economists and so on, and with the diversification of membership came the diversification of projects. Although they view art and society as being connected, Crvena acts more as an organisation to bring people together and pursue projects that may not be purely artistic or political. It therefore pushes or allows artists to be socially engaged, rather than channeling social engagement through art. One project (2012) was centered on the lack of public play spaces for children. Using abandoned objects and spaces, the organisation created a new city playground 'in which learning is a game and playing is a necessity for everyone' (Crvena, 2012). In 2013, they also ran a book club for youths to engage them in reading and talking about issues that are not often discussed in society, such as feminism and sex.

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<sup>150</sup> Interview with Nela Hasanbegović: Artist, Ars Kozara participant and Crvena member (21/06/2014)

So what is important about and why include these projects if they are not directly connected to art practices? My reasons are twofold: first, in the debate around socially engaged or political art practices, there is much talk about the ways in which art practices are socially engaged and how effective or ineffective this is, but very little discussion of artists themselves being engaged outside of these practices. Whilst art can help to address gaps or problems in society that are being ignored by approaching them in creative, performative ways (Cohen-Cruz, 2002; Mouffe, 2008), I have outlined the issue of blurred lines between art and outreach projects. In the highly politicised context of Bosnia, this becomes heightened when we consider the pressures placed on artists to speak to certain narratives and quotas. By removing said narratives from their work but using their collective powers to work on issues outside of their art, Bosnian artists and cultural workers are working to normalise the spaces of art production to expand the fields of expression. Of course we cannot separate art from politics, but it is possible for Bosnian artists to expand the frameworks of politics available to them by compartmentalising the artist and activist sides of their lives.

Second, in arguing for the normalisation of art spaces and antipolitical approaches in Bosnia, it could easily be argued that artists who take this approach are whitewashing the past or ignoring political issues. By including these outreach projects in my research, I am demonstrating how artists and collectives are engaging with society and politics outside of their practices, leaving them free to include or ignore this in their work as they please. It must once again be reiterated that artists should be free to engage with themes of war and ethnicity, but that this should not be automatically expected of them. This chapter has demonstrated that even antipolitical artists such as Tač.ka are very involved with external activism projects. Antipolitics simply refers to artists' refusal of their work being forced to engage in dominant narratives of Bosnia or being absorbed into ethno-nationalist debates. Through their work both in and outside of art, young Bosnian artists are creating a functioning and more open system of cultural production to build on for the future.

## Conclusion

This chapter has traced the role of Yugonostalgia in contemporary Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly, from conceptual examinations to practical applications. This has implications not only for the study of (Yugo)nostalgia but also the study of alternative geographies, politics and identities in postwar Bosnia.

My research highlights the more active qualities of Yugonostalgia and its role in shifting borders, politics and organising structures beyond those entrenched by ethno-elites and the Dayton agreement. Existing literature in political geography on Bosnia has tended to analyse formal politics and legal structures. Whilst alternatives have been hinted at, there is little engagement with these alternatives. By bringing in nostalgia studies and their focus on the ‘microanalysis of the everyday’ (Luthar and Pušnik, 2010, p. 12), I have shifted my analysis towards a more feminist/subaltern approach that engages with bottom-up processes involved in the (re)production and perception of place. Cultural workers in Bosnia are at the forefront of this work, with groups such as Akcija demonstrating the productive quality of Yugonostalgia in action. Projects such as Kultura 2020 once again show that systemic problems in Bosnia run across ethnic lines and so too do the solutions.

I have also outlined several routes towards normalising the spaces of artistic production. First by exploring Akcija’s proactive approach towards creating a new and inclusive system, and reopening supposedly doomed institutions; and second, by demonstrating the ways that artists multiply the politics available to them in their work by compartmentalizing their roles as artists and activists. The two will always be interlinked but this is one way to simultaneously avoid critiques of whitewashing or ignoring the past, and pressures to engage with *a* politics in specific and narrow ways through their work. In studies of art in contested contexts, this is a fine line to tread but one that is essential to create more nuanced accounts of art, politics and place.



## Chapter Ten: Conclusion

A quarter of a century has passed since the start of the Bosnian war and the region continues to be framed by these violent events. Though violent conflict has ended, the region is still caught in nationalist and Balkanist imaginaries that have real political consequences. Scholars such as Todorova (2009) have highlighted the Balkanist discourses that have shaped identities and perceptions of the region however, these perceptions still persist twenty years on from the original 1997 publication of *Imagining the Balkans* (Todorova, 2009), and academic studies have yet to move beyond textual and cultural analysis of the stereotyping outlined in the book.

My research has taken an alternative approach, to look at the country and how it is imagined in different ways that might help alter people's perceptions of it. It has also recognised overlooked people, places and practices in order to demonstrate how engagement with art practices in Bosnia can provide new frameworks and perspectives on the alternative geographies, politics and identities of the country. Furthermore, it has picked up where studies of Balkanism have left off, to engage directly with the ways that people in the region are challenging and subverting Balkanist discourses. This focus has highlighted new conceptual themes and methodological approaches that can inform future work.

The study is framed in terms of several strands of thinking within and beyond academic geography and extends them to provide an account of important, overlooked practices and how they engage with place, space, territory and geopolitical imaginaries. Engaging with feminist and subaltern geopolitical critiques, I extend the existing political geography literature on Bosnia to include non-orthodox processes and actors in the production of post-Dayton Bosnia. This has revealed how art practices complicate orthodox political processes and open up spaces for questioning. Through collaboration and networks across the borders of the competing ethno-entity system, artists are recreating the shared spaces that, as outlined by scholars such as Coward (2002) and Toal and Dahlman (2011), were destroyed during the war. As my research demonstrates, however, this should not be viewed by artists and audiences as art's primary function or goal in post-conflict contexts.

In much the same way as the recent violent history has kept citizens of the former Yugoslavia trapped in the Balkanist stereotypes outlined by Todorova (2009) and others, these stereotypes and histories continue to frame interest in artistic practices in the region. My research has highlighted the *antipolitical* approaches employed by artists to try to normalise spaces of cultural production, which has implications for how regional scholars in geography and beyond examine both art and society in contemporary Bosnia.

To conclude, I will now restate the questions that underpinned the research and summarise how the analytical chapters have addressed these concerns. I then highlight four key themes that have emerged: art, place and society; active (Yugo)nostalgia; reassessing the role of humour in the study of art and place; and post-Balkanist studies. The thesis closes with a discussion of the successes and limitations of the project, before outlining points for further research.

### **Addressing my research questions**

The three questions that framed my research were:

- 1. How do artists in Bosnia engage with and rework geography?*
- 2. What are the possible political implications of their practices?*
- 3. How can an engagement with these practices help in rethinking the political geography and geopolitics of the region?*

In relation to the first question on how artists in Bosnia engage with and rework geography, Chapters Five and Six outlined the ways that artists in the particularly controversial space of Republika Srpska have interacted with the alternative and multiple layers of history and identity in the region. By focusing on spaces such as Kozara National Park, Prijedor municipality and Republika Srpska more broadly, my research has demonstrated how even in extremely traumatic contexts, artists can question or add to dominant framings of such spaces without removing or disrespecting violent past events. These chapters also highlighted how artistic

practices can reveal other histories, politics and identities in traumatic spaces; ones that are equally important but often overlooked in studies of Prijedor and Republika Srpska, which are still framed in terms of war, ethnicity and division (Belloni, 2005; Moll, 2012; Sen, 2009; Toal and Dahlman, 2011).

The alternative narratives highlighted in the research hint at the existence of more collaborative geographies in Bosnia, as opposed to the fragmented image of the country seen in the political maps drawn by Dayton. These collaborative geographies are outlined in Chapters Eight and Nine, which expand the research beyond engagements with specific sites and narratives to explore the difference in borders when examining networks and organisation outside of formal political actors. This highlights not only the ways that artists and cultural workers disrupt processes of ethno-nationalist border construction, but also the maps they are creating themselves through collaboration and networking.

Chapter Seven presented an alternative framework for responding to and presenting traumatic geographies: humour. This bridges the functions of the first and last two chapters in regards to the question of reworking geographies by outlining not only how artists reject singular narratives of place, but also the connectivity of their practices with each other and the united Yugoslav past. The continuity and prevalence of humour in former Yugoslav society and art practices offers a unique insight into the social relations of postwar Bosnia. This has implications for the study of humour in geography more broadly. It can offer key insights into place and society, but is currently a rather marginal area of study. I will discuss this further in my analysis of humour as one of the key themes of the research.

My second research question queried the political implications of artistic engagements with geography. These implications are highlighted specifically in Chapters Eight and Nine, but run throughout the thesis, demonstrating the alternative collaborative politics of artists and cultural workers, connections with Yugoslav geographies and practices, and challenges to Balkanist representations of the region. As detailed in Chapter Nine, connections to the Yugoslav past do not indicate a longing to return to this period but rather an alternative mode of analysing and reworking the present. Artists and cultural workers in Bosnia and the former

Yugoslavia are reworking politics and borders to achieve essential changes to the structures in which they work.

Chapters Seven and Eight demonstrate how these connections and identifications with the Yugoslav past also challenge Balkanist discourses of the former Yugoslavia. By exploring humour and collaboration in regional art practices, my research has engaged with the ways that artists are actively subverting dominant framings of Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly, as well as working together to create a distigmatised geography of art, which scholars such as Kaufmann (2004) have called for in practices of regional art histories.

This has implications for my final research question on rethinking the political geography and geopolitics of the region. By engaging with the alternative practices of artists and cultural workers, my research has employed a feminist/subaltern approach to the study of the political geography and geopolitics of the region by focusing on ‘the people *on* the map[s]’ (Koopman, 2011, p. 275), rather than their disenfranchisement via the processes of drawing said maps. This not only reveals the alternative solidarities, voices and spaces left out of current examinations of the Balkans, but also challenges the way that western academics choose to explore geographies, politics and identities in postwar Bosnia.

Creative practices are one way of demonstrating how everyday citizens organise around identities outside of those prescribed by ethno-nationalist politicians and processes of fragmentation. Two decades on from the wars that broke up Yugoslavia, it is essential to move beyond a focus on orthodox political actors and processes in the individual states they produced. Whilst focus on these processes has done much to deconstruct the framings of conflict in the region and its results, ignoring the politics that happen outside of these spaces serves only to reinforce them as the singular or optimal level of analysis. Art links into the multitude of experiences and shared problems in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia more broadly; and the solutions cultural workers have offered have implications for studies of other sectors and post conflict reconstruction.

Based on these questions and my analysis more broadly, four key interrelated themes have emerged: the relations between art, place and society; the active role of (Yugo)nostalgia in addressing contemporary problems; the place of humour in the study of both art and Bosnian/ex-Yugoslav society; and the ways that research might strive towards a post-Balkanist approach to studying the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The following sections will explore these themes and their implications for further research.

### **Art, place and society**

A central theme throughout the thesis has been to explore and engage with the multiple relationships between art, place and society. A key challenge has been to shift the study of these relationships from ones that are directly political and engaged with issues related to Bosnia's recent past, towards more antipolitical projects that aim to normalise or recontextualise space. This has implications for the study of socially engaged art, since it demonstrates the ways that art is always entangled with politics but questions how artists can choose to engage with this. Studies of socially engaged or overtly political art ignore the role of artists in society outside of their practice. In the existing literature on the relationship between art and politics, there is little discussion of artists as political actors outside of their work, which leaves us with a rather one dimensional view. My research goes beyond explorations of artworks alone to examine the ways that artists exist and act on multiple levels. This not only highlights the entangled nature of art and politics but also, in controversial contexts such as Bosnia, it demonstrates how artists themselves are entangled with politics. Acknowledging the artist as a political actor outside of their artistic production opens out the content and forms of expression available to artists working in controversial contexts such as Bosnia. Additionally, it shifts modes of artistic analysis towards a more holistic approach that considers the multiple elements surrounding the production, reception and display of works, not only the works themselves.

As Chapter Five explored in the context of Kozara National Park, normalising and recontextualising does not have to come at the expense of decontextualising traumatic spaces. Tač.ka's *Ars Kozara* project shows how over an eight-year period, artists have both engaged with the specificities of the site, but have also added new

contextual layers to an area that has experienced particularly violent histories. A key aim of artistic projects such as *Ars Kozara* is the opening up of context and the means of expression available to artists in Bosnia to provoke a questioning of existing narratives and engagements with the site. In an area so caught up in history and competing cults of commemoration (Miller, 2006), my research demonstrates how art can help to disrupt the elite-level processes drawing up new histories and borders in the region.

Building on the questions surrounding the multiple narratives of contested spaces raised in Chapter Five, Chapter Six explored the entanglement of art and politics further; and the ways that challenges to politics from a knowledge of art's situatedness within it may be more effective than naïve beliefs that it is possible to work outside politics. Through an exploration of space and identity in Republika Srpska, my research shows how artists rework elements of both to provoke questions, and hint at alternative narratives and structures. The question is what impact art has as part of, rather than a comment on, these structures. If art is inherently part of the politics it critiques or parodies then as Rancière (2010, p. 145) states, it 'must become more modest ... (not profess) to be able to reveal the hidden contradictions of our world.' Approaches to art that follow this logic allow it more agency because they assume that 'art affects this reality precisely because it is entangled into all of its aspects' (Steyerl 2014, 5), not simply because it makes a statement about reality.

Connected to the process of normalising spaces of cultural production and antipolitical approaches in Bosnia is the idea of the socially engaged artist outlined in Chapter Nine. There has been much debate around socially engaged art (Bishop, 2006, 2012; Mouffe, 2008) and my research has demonstrated that in the context of Bosnia, pressures to adhere to political or socially engaged tropes in art practices are mirrored in society more broadly. These pressures are potentially reductive of both art production and the Bosnian public. This part of my research showed how artists and collectives are engaging with society and politics outside of their practices, leaving them free to include or ignore this in their work as they please. Artists in Bosnia and post-conflict societies more broadly should be free to engage with themes

of war and ethnicity, but audiences, especially international ones, should not automatically expect this of them.

To avoid claims of whitewashing or ignorance, it is important to acknowledge that even antipolitical artists such as Tač.ka are very involved with external activism projects. Antipolitics simply refers to artists' refusal of their work being forced to engage in dominant narratives of Bosnia or being absorbed into ethno-nationalist debates. Through their work both in and outside of art, young Bosnian artists are creating a functioning and more open system of cultural production to build on for the future. This has implications for the future of both cultural production in Bosnia and global cultural spheres more broadly. It also places art and artists in a key role that is symbiotic with society, repositioning them in similar ways to the role they played in Yugoslavia.

By normalising the spaces of analysis, art is freed from the stigma of its geographical context, one that is particularly heightened in non-Western contexts. This has implications outside of art practices, as studying the more open and multiple contexts of non-Western or post-conflict societies can reveal hidden narratives and problems. Of course, a key problem is to find the balance between neither exoticising nor homogenising spaces. Some of the projects outlined in Chapter Eight have demonstrated how art practitioners are approaching this dilemma in creative ways that might be extended to studies beyond art history.

### **Active (Yugo)nostalgia**

My research has also contributed to more active interpretations of nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Carabelli, 2013; Lindstrom, 2005) and how this disrupts the borders and divisions drawn by war. Chapter Seven demonstrates the continuity and solidarities that form around humour in the former Yugoslavia, suggesting that connections and identification with the borders of the more inclusive former state still exist amongst the citizens of its ethnicised successor states. But as Chapters Eight and Nine explore further, nostalgia or identification with Yugoslavia does not represent a straightforward longing or desire to replicate the past. Instead, Yugonostalgia acts as an active reframing of present structures to address, where possible, shared problems.

Chapters Seven and Eight outlined some elements of Yugonostalgia across various fields: humour, art, politics, popular culture, tourism and landscapes. Building on Boym's (2001) definition of *reflective* and *restorative* nostalgia, and Lindstrom's (2005) application of this to the Yugoslav context, my research adjusts examinations of *reflective* Yugonostalgia and places it in opposition to a *restorative* nostalgia that has no basis in the Yugoslav past, but rather in the (imagined) homogenous ethno-communities that predated its existence. This demonstrates the role of Yugonostalgia in opposition to contemporary politics, however it does not mean that citizens wish to reinstate the old system, but rather that they use elements of the past to reframe identities and borders in the present.

Writing about the destruction of Yugoslavia regional scholar Jasminka Udovički (1997, p. 304) commented that:

moral catharsis [in the former Yugoslavia] is unlikely in the short run. The war has impoverished the moral life of the country too deeply. Yet in the long run, some form of cooperation, economic above all, will be restored between the former Yugoslav republics. Without such cooperation, the successor states will face insurmountable obstacles to development.

Twenty years later, we see this cooperation happening in the arts to expand the limited markets and exhibiting opportunities in individual states; but also in the events of 2014: the protests surrounding the country's further deindustrialisation, and collaborative flood responses. The collective frameworks present under socialism are resurfacing in the face of shared crises. This has implications for how we study nostalgia, Yugoslavia, and cooperation in post-conflict societies.

### **Reassessing the role of humour in the study of art and place**

As explored in Chapter Eight, humour has been undervalued in studies of both geography and art. Some emerging studies in geography and anthropology (Carty and Musharbash, 2008; Dodds and Kirby, 2013; Kuus, 2008) have begun to acknowledge the benefit and depth humour can add to studies of place and geopolitics. My research has combined this with studies of trauma and humour in relation to the holocaust (Polsky, 2002; Rovner, 2012), and an analysis of the



prominent and enduring role of humour in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, in order to show its subversive quality in contemporary Bosnian art practices and society. A study of humour not only shows continuity with the Yugoslav past and similarities between the successor states, but also challenges regional and international stereotypes.

The concept of humour in traumatic contexts can seem shocking or insensitive to liberal Western audiences. But as scholars exploring the Holocaust (Polsky, 2002; Rovner, 2012), and my own research on Bosnia and Yugoslavia, have demonstrated, humour can act as a way for victims to deny their role as such. It challenges common assumptions of violent events and can provoke a questioning of the status quo in postconflict societies. This is due to the dissonance between the serious subject matter and humourous approach. For local audiences, it might open up space for them to question contemporary issues in Bosnia and their position in relation to this. For the international community, it can maybe help them to reconsider their role in entrenching discourses of division and ethno-nationalist violence. In academic terms, it establishes humour as a valuable analytical tool when considering the relationship between art, politics and identity.

If Todorova (2009) asserts that Balkan stereotypes have been entrenched over the centuries through the Western imagination, then my exploration of humour in contemporary art practices has shown how comic subversion of these stereotypes can reclaim identities. By fixing on ways that artists subvert regional and international stereotypes, my research reinserts agency into the study of geography, politics and identity in contemporary Bosnia. Whilst not always readily translatable, if international scholars and audiences can push past this, humour could add significantly to studies of the region by offering more nuanced views of fragmentation, social relationships and regional stereotypes.

### **Post-Balkanist studies**

Scholars across disciplines have drawn on Todorova's (2009) exploration of Balkanist discourse to examine cultural representations of the region (Goldsworthy, 2013) and the role of such discourse in the breakup of Yugoslavia (Bakic-Hayden, 1995; Campbell, 1999; Jeffrey, 2013; Petras and Vieux, 1996). However, there is

limited research on how people in the region are engaging with these stereotypes in order to subvert them, or much acknowledgement of the Balkans as a site of relevance to broader postcolonial and subaltern research. Whilst a distinct region in relation to such studies and one with an earlier experience of independence, it shares the experience of having a long history of occupation, which shaped regional identities and politics. Additionally, the former Yugoslavia has connections with many of the countries that make up the focus of postcolonial and subaltern research, through collaboration under the non-aligned movement.

As Chapter Eight outlined, neocolonial approaches to the breakup of Yugoslavia laid the foundations for a more benign aid dependency relationship between the countries of the former Yugoslavia and the West (Jeffrey, 2013; Sivac-Bryant, 2016). The protracted presence of NGOs in Bosnia has led to a nanny approach to Bosnia and its citizens and assumptions that they do not know what is best for them, as noted by scholars such as Jeffrey (2007). This in turn has led to limited links with locals and the real needs of communities and blocked some positive initiatives for change.

The problem of Othering extends to the former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe more broadly. In the cultural field, more and more artists and curators are attempting to work around colonial relationships towards Eastern European art (Badovinac et al., 2012; Cârnei, 2007; Kazalarska, 2013), showing that art can be a powerful tool in the redefinition of borders and history. Redefining existing borders and history is an important task but it is difficult to balance the line of neither Othering nor homogenising the art histories of Eastern Europe.

My research has explored some of the ways that cultural workers are collaborating to normalise the practices of Eastern European artists, and to talk about their work in ways that do not exoticise their geographical context, but equally do not compare them to Western art histories. By creating these collective histories, cultural workers in the former Yugoslavia are able to frame works outside of global narratives of the region, providing a space where artists cease to be Serb, Bosniak, Croat, Slovene and so on, and are just seen as artists with a unique position from which to explore different themes. This links back to concepts of normalising the spaces in which art is produced and consumed, which is a common problem for artists working in an ex-

Yugoslav or Balkan context due to the recent violent histories that have dominated discussions of both art and the region more broadly.

Through engagement with contemporary art practices in Bosnia, I have explored the ways that artists respond to regional stereotypes, once again demonstrating the agency of Bosnian citizens to (re)appropriate identities in a confusing post-imperial, post-socialist and postwar context. This focus on agency, identity and the legacies of European Othering has led me to explore subaltern approaches in geography and beyond. Whilst subaltern studies have been incorporated into geographical research in terms of rethinking theory and practice, Balkanism has yet to be explored in the same way. Studies of Balkanism still remain mostly at the level of analysing the processes of oppression, not the agency and heterogeneity of the oppressed. Whilst some attempts have been made to push the focus towards regional challenges to Balkanist discourses (Bjelić and Savić, 2002), they mostly still follow the more passive applications of subaltern approaches, such as textual and cultural analysis.

By engaging more actively with projects and collaborations in the former Yugoslavia, my research has highlighted the benefits of employing subaltern studies to move beyond the discourses that keep the region trapped in certain narratives. One such regional collaboration that the research explore in Chapter Eight is the ArtEast 2000+ collection in Ljubljana, which strives to conceptualise Balkan art as a heterogeneous but nonetheless unified space against the construction of this space as liminal to the west. This is a direct example of how Balkan artists and scholars have created their own spaces of knowledge production by acknowledging their marginalised position and working with that, rather than against it. Such an approach can position the region in a space for dialogue with the west, rather than in a position to simply be absorbed.

The above example highlights the new approaches that Balkan studies can bring to subaltern research. In the Balkans, humour, subversion and collaboration are key approaches to challenging Othering discourses, which might be of wider relevance to fields such as subaltern studies. Incorporating studies of the Balkans into the wider literature on subaltern theory may have implications for both fields. The two share many similarities but yield different results. And whilst subaltern studies have been

incorporated into geographical research in terms of rethinking theory and practice, Balkanism has yet to be explored in the same way. Scholars exploring the concept of Balkanism have drawn on postcolonial literature, and particularly Said's (1979) *Orientalism*, to reveal the processes of Othering that have occurred in the region; however, they have not engaged extensively with the aims of Subaltern Studies scholars to reinsert agency and multiple voices in academic research. Studies of Balkanism still remain mostly at the level of analysing the processes of oppression, not the agency and heterogeneity of the oppressed. My research has engaged directly with artists and art practices in Bosnia to demonstrate the ways that such processes are being challenged, and how this has shaped regional framings of solidarity amongst cultural workers in the Balkans.

### **Concluding remarks and notes for further research**

My research has demonstrated the benefits of engaging with everyday actors and processes in post conflict contexts to reveal alternative geographies, identities and politics. It has also demonstrated the different position of art and art histories in one non-Western society, and the attempts made to frame regional art histories in ways that are distinct from but not liminal to those of the West. Examining these art histories and contemporary practices can reveal elements hidden from studies of controversial contexts, which tend to maintain a focus on formal political actors and processes.

The work does not claim to speak for all Bosnians, nor does it deny that many citizens do align themselves with ethno-nationalist politics. Rather it aims to push studies towards more active engagements with on-the-ground communities. In the context of post conflict societies, and the former Yugoslavia specifically, my research also engages with those groups that represent the more moderate populations left out of discussions during the conflicts that broke up the country. Scholars in geography (see for example Campbell, 1999) have hinted at these alternative voices but have yet to engage with them directly. Mass protests in Serbia and artistic resistance in Bosnia during the nineties demonstrate significant opposition to the politics that divided up the Yugoslav map, but they were and continue to be side-lined in academic and international engagements with the region.

Alternative geographies, identities and politics are not only present in art practices. They can be seen across a number of other sectors in Bosnia, demonstrated by the mass protests and citizen's plenums of 2014. As my research has outlined, many industries experience the same problems as the cultural sector as part of the condition of living in a system that has been politically fragmented and plagued by corruption. The networks and initiatives outlined in the thesis point to alternative solutions outside of formal politics that could be applied to both the study and practice of other fields. But most importantly, I hope that it fosters more interest in the study of the former Yugoslavia beyond war, ethno-nationalist politics and division. As my research demonstrates, many of the problems faced by people in the region are a result of the entrenchment of ethno-nationalist politics in the post-Dayton system, but not directly related to ethnicity. Moving beyond the divisions of formal politics reveals alternative frameworks for both research on and progress in the region.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: List of interviewees

Name	Location	Date	Role
Sjur Hamr	Mostar	21/05/2014	UWC, Mostar Student and SAF Mostar participant
Marko Zadro	Mostar	22/05/2014	Artist, Mostar
Valentina Mindoljević	Mostar	22/05/2014	Head of UWC, Mostar
Miran Hasibović	Mostar	25/05/2014	Owner of iHouse Travel, Mostar and creator of the Be Hilarious project
Selma (anonymised)	Sarajevo	25/05/2015	Activist and Language Teacher
Dejan (anonymised)	Prijedor	23/08/2014	Railway worker and <i>Ars Kozara</i> visitor/volunteer
Aida Salketić	Sarajevo	12/08/2015	Art Historian. Works at Cultural Heritage without Borders and writes for Sarajevo Culture Bureau (SCB)
Jusuf Hadžifesović	Sarajevo	20/06/2014	Artist and owner/curator of Charlama Depot
Jonathan Blackwood	Sarajevo/Aberdeen	20/06/2014	Art Historian, curator and editor of SCB
Nela Hasenbegović	Sarajevo	21/06/2014	Artist and member of Crvena group
Borjana Mrđa	Banja Luka	17 and 19/06, 2014; 08/07/2014 (Studio Visit)	Artist and teacher at Banja Luka Art Academy
Mladen Miljanović	Banja Luka	18/02/2014; 09/07/2014	Artist and teacher at Banja Luka Art Academy
Darko (anonymised)	Prijedor	30/08/2014	Member of the Prijedor diaspora
Mirko (anonymised)	Prijedor	21/02/2014	Local NGO Member
Berislav Blagojević	Banja Luka	19/02/2014	Writer
Nemanja Čado	Prijedor	Multiple February 2014 – September 2015	Artist and Tač.ka coordinator
Dragan Indžić	Prijedor	Multiple February	Artist and Tač.ka member

		2014 – September 2015	
Mladen Bundalo	Ghent/Prijedor	07/03/2014; August 2014	Artist and founding Tač.ka member
Igor Sovilj	Berlin/Prijedor	30/08/2014	Artist and founding Tač.ka member
Sladjana Miljević	Prijedor	17/06/2014; 20/05/2015	Director of Progetto Prijedor NGO
Nataša Pjević	Prijedor	07/07/2014	PR, Nacionalni Park Kozara
Andrej Bereta	Prijedor	Multiple February 2014 – September 2015	Art Historian and curator, Prijedor/Belgrade/Banja Luka; co-director of Artikal NGO
Maja Abdemerović	Sarajevo	14/08/2014; 28/08/2015	Head curator, National Gallery of BiH
Pierre Courtin	Sarajevo	20/06/2014; 27/08/2015	Owner/curator, Duplex 100m2
Melita and Bojan Matović-Fligler	Zagreb/London	August 2014	Artists ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Vladimir Sekulić	Krupanj, Serbia	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Aleksa Gajić	Belgrade	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Ivana Živković	Banja Luka	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Tanja Marić	Banja Luka	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Su Vulović	Trebinje	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Danka Terzić	Trebinje	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Davor Paponja	Banja Luka	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Miodrag Jović	Banja Luka	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Biljana Banović	Novi Sad (Prijedor native)	Multiple August 2014 – September 2015	Journalist and Tač.ka member
Irena Mirković	Belgrade	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Bojana Radenović	Belgrade	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Goran Čupić	Banja Luka	August	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)

		2014; August 2015 (during Ars Kozara)	
Aleksandra Kukoljac	Banja Luka	August 2014	Artist ( <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2014)
Marina Đapić	Mostar	22/05/2014	Head of Youth Council and organiser of SAF
Mela Žuljević	Mostar	26/05/2014	Artist and Abart coordinator
Samra Tozo	Sarajevo	14/05/2015	Artangle project coordinator
Ines Tanović- Sjerčić	Sarajevo	23/05/2015; 27/08/2015	Akcija/Kultura 2020 coordinator
Emir Hodžić	Prijedor/Sarajevo/New Zealand	18/05/2015	Artist and activist
Branko Ćulibrk	Prijedor	Multiple February 2014 – September 2015	Centar za Mlade Kvart
Stefan Gvozden	Prijedor	Multiple February 2014 – September 2015	Centar za Mlade Kvart
Goran Zorić	Prijedor	Multiple February 2014 – September 2015	Centar za Mlade Kvart
Veso Sovilj	Banja Luka	18/02/2014	Artist and professor at Banja Luka Art Academy
Dajan Spirić	Banja Luka	August 2014; August 2015 (during Ars Kozara)	Founding member of Tač.ka
Žana Vukičević	Banja Luka	18/02/2014; 16/08/2015	Curator of Museum of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka
Mirjana Kodžo, Nevena Kosović and Milica Lojović	Trebinje	August 2015	Rizba art association and participants <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Jelena Batelić and Dajana	Rijeka/Labin (Croatia)	August 2015	Participants <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015

Durić			
Polimorf	Belgrade (Serbia)	August 2015	Art collective and participants <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Djurdjica Bjelosević	Banja Luka	15/07/2015; August 2015	Conservator-restorer at the National Museum Banja Luka; artist; participant <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Nina Komel	Brod (BiH)/Novi Sad (Serbia)	August 2015	Artist and documentarist <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Sunčica Pasuljević-Kandić	Novi Sad (Serbia)	August 2015	Participant <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Nina Plakatić	Zagreb (Croatia)	August 2015	Participant <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Sandy Ding	China	August 2015	Participant <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Giacomo Regallo	Italy	August 2015	Participant <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Joana Quiroga and Federico Fedone	Brazil	August 2015	Participants <i>Ars Kozara</i> 2015
Daniel Premec	Sarajevo	21/06/2014	Artist and professor at academy
Branka Vujanović	Sarajevo	20/06/2014	Curator, Collegium Artisticum
Ismar Ćirkinagić	Prijedor/Copenhagen	Multiple February 2014 – September 2015	Artist

## Appendix 2: List of exhibitions

Name	Date	Location
Iz/uzetnosti: Savremena umetnička scena Republike Srpske	18/02/2014	Museum of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka
Street Art Festival (SAF)	22-28/05/2014	Various locations, Mostar
Starmo Machinerija	22/05/2014	Gallery Virus, Mostar
Momentum	28/05/2014	National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo
Desire for Freedom	28/05/2014	National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo
Ars Aevi Colletion	28/05/2014	Ars Aevi, Sarajevo
Manifest	28/05/2014	WC, Skenderija, Sarajevo
Duplex 100m2	Multiple (May 2014; May 2015)	Duplex 100m2 Gallery
<i>Ars Kozara</i>	Multiple (June and August 2014; August 2015)	Kozara National Park
Dobrović, Šumanović, Konjović, Šuput: Evropski Kontekst	18/06/2014	Museum of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka
Students' Exhibition	19/06/2014	Banja Luka Art Academy
Depotgraphy	20/06/2014	Charlama, Sarajevo
Sarajevo 100	20/06/2014	Collegium Artisticum, Sarajevo
Memory Lane: Contemporary Art Scene from Bosnia and Herzegovina	19/07/2014	Galerie du Jour Agnès b, Paris
Prigušena egzistencija: Savremena umetnička scena Srbije	03/05/2015	Museum of Contemporary Art, Banja Luka
Tito-trilogija Milomira Kovačevića	12/05/2015	Zvono Gallery, Sarajevo
Izložba nastavnika i saradnika Akademije likovnih umjetnosti Trebinje	12/05/2015	Collegium Artisticum, Sarajevo
Sarajevo Art Fair	21/05/2015	National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo
Izložba učenika srednje škole primijenjenih umetnika u Sarajevu povodom 70. Godina postojanja	06/06/2015	Collegium Artisticum, Sarajevo
Dežurne Zemaljski	27/08/2015	Zemaljski Muzej, Sarajevo
On Revolution's Road	21/07/2016	The Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana (Slovenia)
Low Budget Utopias	22/07/2016	The Museum of Contemporary Art



		Metelkova, Ljubljana (Slovenia)
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Notes on exhibitions: In BiH and the general ex-Yu region, there is a fast turnover of exhibitions (every fortnight). It is therefore hard to say how many I went to but the table above lists the ones I have either referenced or listed in my field notes.